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dependent, Jewish & frankly feminist

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*a special section on Jewish men

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Ilene Beckerman

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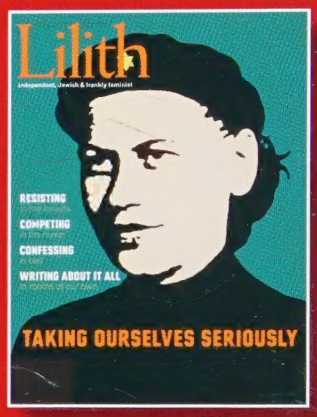

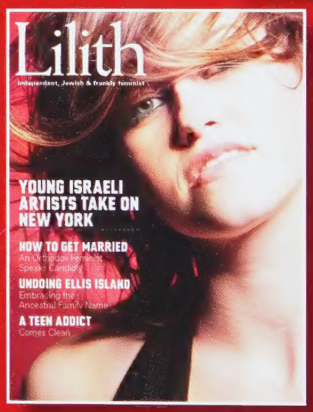

Lilith

fall 2009
vol. 34, no. 3

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

34

3 **From the Editor**

Susan Weidman Schneider on how women model Judaism for boys and men.

4 **Voices: Jewish Women Speak Out**

Dueling views of therapy • Housewives and heroines from Israel • At 95, grateful for contraception • A "shocking" girls' school • Inside the Beltway with Ann F. Lewis and Belle Moskowitz • And more…

10 **Home**

A short story by Zeeva Bukai

14 **Poetry**

"Tishre" *by Yiskah Rosenfeld;* "Whenever I am Hungry" *by Judy Neri*

36 **Reviews**

Francine Prose reads Anne Frank. Gloria Feldt tackles family planning. Yael Flusberg on Janice Erlbaum. Nehama Leibowitz, revealed. Viva Hammer admires the little Jewish house on the prairie. *The Hunger Artist* reviewed by Rachel Kranson. Plus three new novels at the intersection of love and location.

46 **Happening**

compiled by Naomi Danis

Your indispensable guide

48 **Grasping for the Remote**

by Deborah Adelman

In 1968, when none of the news was good, her grandmother tried to protect her.

16 **Jewish Men Now**

Guest editor Sarah Blustain spotlights men who are incubating some pretty radical thoughts on gender and Judaism: Rabbis Steven Greenberg and Jeremy Kalmanofsky and writers Jay Michaelson and Paul Zakrzewski, Melanie Weiss's short history of the "boy crisis," and Sally Gottesman on how to pull boys back to Judaism.

28 **Celebrations**

by Elizabeth Bennett

Look again at how we're marking the passages in our lives, from publishing a new book to hilarious seder homework, from wedding seriousness to birthday frolicking. Not to get all Martha Stewart on you, but this is definitely the moment to do things differently.

34 **The Tighter I Held On, the Better He Wrote**

by Bel Kaufman

The author of *Up the Down Staircase* captures her very special grandfather on the 150th anniversary of his birth; he was that entrancing weaver of Yiddish tales, Sholom Aleichem, whose stories about daughters and parents became "Fiddler of the Roof."

Cover: Joan Roth, "Safareh," 1986.

28

16

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In the olden days, Sensitive New Age Guys (even Jewish ones) were trying to understand women. Some of them were doing it sincerely, others ironically. Now, Jewish men are asking different questions—and they're not about women, but about themselves.

Jewish guys are going public, quite directly, with their deepest thoughts about manhood. Michael Chabon has just published *Manhood for Amateurs*, autobiographical essays; Sam Apple probes his fatherhood experience in *American Parent*; and the anthology *Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex and Power*, edited by Shira Tarrant, features Jewish men in the mix. All these people are trying to parse out meanings and models for masculinity. Or, more accurately, masculinities. Definitions and practices of being male and Jewish, definitions once universally known and understood even if they were then rejected, are now under scrutiny.

Jewish boys are on center stage now. They're the source of our latest demographic panic (after intermarriage, and the low Jewish birth rate). Who ever thought we'd be worrying about keeping boys and men interested in Jewish life?

It's a process taking place on many levels, and in many settings. Jewish summer camps, congregations and other institutions are losing boys and men, and waking up to the fact that men likely want what Jewish women have created: a chance to learn and grow into a spirituality that meets them in the modern world, plus projects and liturgies and rituals they themselves have an opportunity to shape and thus to own.

Some suggest revisiting separate spaces and experiences for male and female. The very idea raises the hackles of those who've struggled to make sure women have equal access to everything Judaism offers, and that women's own experiences are valued. Congregations that had phased out "sisterhood" and "brotherhood" groups and were looking simply for near-equal participation by women and men are thinking again. Feminism opened opportunities for women to experience every role in non-Orthodox Jewish life: rabbi, cantor, mohel, congregation president, psalmist, educator. Egalitarian ended up meaning women and girls get to do a lot (though still not enough, if you look at professional and volunteer leadership in the Jewish community). Now, we're told that organizations want to prompt the same excitement in men and boys, who have no recollection of the halcyon days when the synagogue was a men's club, and when the Sunday morning "Tallis and Tefillin Breakfast Club" announcements did not need to say "men only"—since the club was by its title obviously only for those with male privilege.

Now, some of the resources that have gone into encouraging girls and young women to feel connected to Jewish life are tilting toward boys and young men. I've said before that 21st Century etiquette is that women are (figuratively) opening doors for men. It's happening.

In this issue Lilith looks at ways feminism has left its mark on men probing both their own experience and Jewish archetypes, from the Bible to queer theory. The process looks familiar, since this radical questioning and re-visioning echoes some of the qualities of women's consciousness raising. Like those CR groups, Jewish men are exploring gender identity in a frank and nuanced way, trying out different lenses, looking back at their own experiences, re-examining our culture's expectations for male Jews, and beginning to turn these expectations on their ear (or other body parts).

Jewish men are beginning to probe both their own experiences and Jewish archetypes, using everything from the Bible to queer theory. Jewish feminists have modeled for these men some of the ways they can debunk limiting gender stereotypes and—maybe—move on to new definitions of Jewish masculinity.

Among our authors, Jay Michaelson and Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky see a softer masculine model in the biblical David, as both lover and father; Rabbi Steve Greenberg ponders whether he can embrace a men-only religious experience after the egalitarian practices of feminism; and Paul Zakrzewski mulls over his Jewish identity after he discovered, in high school, that "I wasn't much of a man."

Sally Gottesman, whom I interviewed in this section, may have the last—and most hopeful—word. "I think that feminism is about helping women and men become full human beings, and we are inching slowly towards this."

Read on!

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

No Limits for Ann Lewis!

In June, the National Jewish Democratic Council (NJDC) honored political advisor and longtime women's rights activist **Ann F. Lewis** (left) with an award named for **Belle Moskowitz**. Lewis, who headed **Hillary Clinton**'s presidential campaign, is now president of No Limits, a non-partisan, non-political organization working on local, national and global challenges. Moskowitz (right) was a settlement worker, civic reformer, and labor mediator who became one of the closest advisors to New York governor **Alfred E. Smith** in the 1920s. She organized his campaigns and served as a strategist in his "kitchen cabinet." By the time Smith ran for president in 1928, Moskowitz was by far the most powerful woman in the national Democratic Party—the only Jewish woman and the only woman unconnected to a prominent family to achieve such standing, according to the NJDC.

"Sometimes we are treated as though we were the organization of eczema sufferers in the Haredi world," **Malcah** says. "We're told that as soon as we recognize that a problem exists, we also encourage it. Maybe that's true, but the problem still exists."

"Coming here is a joy. It doesn't solve my problems, and doesn't increase my child support payments. The main thing here is dealing with things together, and the fact that the staff put their hearts and souls into it. It's a heavy load; it grows much lighter together," **Aliza** says.

Good words for Em Habanim, an Israeli nonprofit organization working with divorced haredi (ultra-Orthodox) women from "What's an Ultra-Orthodox Divorcée To Do?" in Haaretz newspaper, June 1, 2009

What language should women use in honoring the dead?

"Feminist Funerals," by **Amy Stone**, in Lilith's summer issue reported on new ways women are honoring departed friends and relatives. In an email, **Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips** expanded on the article's description of the "Taharah Manual" her Brooklyn burial society has prepared.

"The manual's English translation does not change the 'master of the universe' language of the original but its highly egalitarian language in both the Hebrew and the English honors all six matriarchs. Jewish feminist liturgy has been slow to overcome the social-class bias that excludes Bilhah and Zilpah from their rightful place among the matriarchs (our manual being one of few exceptions)." For those wondering about these additional matriarchs: According to Genesis, Zilpah was the servant of matriarch Leah, and Bilhah the servant of matriarch Rachel, the wives of patriarch Jacob. All four women gave birth to children by Jacob, with their 12 sons' descendants becoming the 12 tribes of Israel. For more on this manual, go to *www.lilith.org/blog/?p=423*.

An unrelated correction: Jewish tradition is for a child to mourn a parent for 11 months *minus* one day. Lilith had said *plus* one day.

"Heroines and Housewives"

They started out as a group of Israeli women artists gathering regularly to critique and support one another's work. They ended up with a cooperative exhibition, held at Jerusalem's Antea Gallery. The show, which comes directly out of the mutual mentoring process, is called "Housewives and Heroines," playing on the text of the psalm "Woman of Valor." **Rita Mendes-Flohr**, gallery director, says the work on display "places women's strength at the center of the discussion."

Below: "A Woman's Freedom" by **Hadassah Berry**, who states in the catalog that the piece "addresses the status of women, and their position in Judaism...where progress has been achieved, but is still inadequate." **Sharon Binder**, in "Two Sisters' Journey" illustrates the narrative of her mother and aunt leaving Europe and making a life—and a living—in the U.S., "They have inspired me to propose a new definition of housewife." About "Breast Plates" **Mallory Serebrin Jacobs**, a potter, says "My marriage brought five children into my life... and then we had a son. Feeding became a major occupation. For this show I focused on plates that feed, thus the Breast Plate. Surrounding the breast are my never-ending to-do lists."

Differing Views of Therapy

In therapy lately, Victor and I have been talking about the space between grandiosity and depression. The dilemma of the gifted child. He was trying to get me to see how it takes work to stop the drama and just be normal.
Vic contends that I display the classic symptoms of the Puer Aeternus, Latin for eternal boy.
Signs of the expression the Puer archetype in a person's life can include immaturity, narcissism a desire to escape into f instead of remaining gro in the reality of a situati
OK, I'll go with that. But hey our ADD curren cultural zeitgeist is just a tad puer too.
I'm always poised precariously above the e refusing to settle down a the hard work of adultho
I must admit it is getti tiresome flying Peter like from one bizarre boy to the next.
Vic and I have been w very hard to move away from my own well-established tendencies of en ment and perer skittishness.

SEXY LADIES
When I complained that things had been a bit mundane lately, he congratulated me and said I was making progress.
Is mundanity progress? But wait, just in time to spice things up, a new horror story hit the media. I told Vic about it in session: A nice Main Line Jewish boy was charged with the murder of his young, beautiful lawyer wife.
He was a latex glove salesman and he frequented a gentlemen's jiggle club called Delilah's Den on Delaware Avenue down by the river.
He spent one to three thousand a week on a dancer named Autumn (not her real name), wa debt up to his lying eyeb and supposedly drowned wife in their bathtub for life insurance policy.
Vic says this proves tha trary to my fantasy, mo marriages are comprom and some even have ver serious, sometimes fata problems.
I guess you c qualify drow your wife serious in of probl

From "Is Mundanity Progress?", session two of "Graphic Therapy," a blog by Emily Steinberg. *www.smithmag.net/graphictherapy*

I have a confession to make: I am deeply skeptical about the value of therapy. Over the course of my life, I have seen several therapists, especially during my tumultuous college years—and yet I find it very difficult to assess those treatments. Rarely does therapy (at least as I've known it) involve the setting of clearly-defined goals, and thus it's very hard to judge when I am "better." A therapist is not like an eye doctor who gives you a vision test and a prescription for glasses; with therapy, the test questions are ongoing, the prescriptions are vague, and often the world looks even blurrier as time goes on.

Many of my friends (some of whom are therapists themselves!) tell me how much therapy has changed their lives, and I have no doubt that this is the case. I do not think that therapy is worthless—I am sure it has improved and even saved many lives. But it has never really worked for me. And so I have developed my own "talking cure"—one that enables me to interact with the world in a way that seems more sensible and meaningful given my needs and values.

About seven years ago, I began volunteering for an organization in New York that cares for elderly, homebound individuals. I was assigned to a blind woman named Anna who lived in a rent-controlled apartment just off of Central Park. I used to visit her at every Sunday morning. For about half of our visits I would read her poems she had written (Anna had hundreds of handwritten manuscript pages that she dreamed that I, the budding editorial assistant, would one day publish for her); for the other half of our time, we would talk about our lives. Anna, who had several unhappy marriages, would tell me about all the men she had gallivanted with; and I, in turn, would tell her about all the men I had not succeeded in doing any gallivanting with just yet. Anna became my confidante—she was homebound, and thus I could be sure that nothing I said would ever leave the confines of her apartment. When she died in February of 2004 on her 91st birthday, I felt the way one feels, I suppose, when a therapist moves away—a sense of loss

The new novel from **Susan Shapiro** is called *Speed Shrinking*, out this fall from St. Martin's. It's about a woman who—fast, fast—consults eight different therapists in eight days. Will speed shrinking take over where speed dating left off? Shapiro's launch parties for this book try out the idea. She invited seven friends—all authors of various self-help books on such subjects as romance, marriage and food obsessions—to give free three-minute counseling sessions to the partygoers.

combined with a sense of need, as if there were a hole in a ground that needed to be filled in before anyone got hurt.

Since Anna, I have had several old ladies in my life, on both sides of the Atlantic. The current one, Sara, is perhaps the most beloved—though I may have said that each time. Sara is, for all intents and purposes, my therapist. For an hour each week she listens to my woes and advises me on how to deal with my problems. She knows all about the politics of the small office where I work, the dynamics in my family, the papers I am writing for school, the men whom I am (unsuccessfully!) pursuing, and those who are (equally unsuccessfully!) pursuing me.

There is nothing I cannot tell her—or almost nothing. I once tried to explain (proceeding cautiously so as to test the waters) that I had set foot in a shul without a mechitza. Judging from her horrified reaction, it was clear that I could never tell her the truth, which is that I read Torah in a fully egalitarian minyan every Shabbat morning. By the same token, I sometimes have to take her advice with a grain of salt ("Wash his clothes, clean his floor, and cook him dinner every night—and don't let him touch you until he marries you!"). But overall, I feel comfortable being honest with her, and I trust fully in the wisdom of her years.

My relationship with Sara is a symbiotic one; we both benefit. She's eager for someone to talk to; I'm in need of the sage advice of an older person who is not part of my insular Anglo community. It means a lot to her that I remember to call her every Wednesday morning to check in about that day's visit; and it means a lot to me that she always remembers what is going on in my life, as if she had just reviewed her notes from the previous week's session.

The world is filled with elderly people who live by themselves and long for companionship. The world is also filled with callow young adults who could benefit from the guidance of someone sufficiently removed from their immediate social milieu. If only these two groups could find one another!

ILANA KURSHAN

As a member of **President Obama's** Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, **Nancy Ratzan**, president of the National Council of Jewish Women clearly believes that faith has a role in government. But... on abortion and other reproductive issues, "I have real concerns about understanding those issues from a faith perspective as opposed to a scientific and individual rights perspective," says Ratzan. "You're creating the possibility that the religious views of some are going to be imposed on others."

from "Obama Seeks Common Ground on Abortion," by Dan Gilgoff, US News and World Report, June 16, 2009

Iranian Jewish writer* Roya Hakakian, *author of* Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran *talked to* Marissa Brostoff, *after the events following this spring's elections, about life for Jews in Iran and Iran's animosity toward Israel:

There are two lines of rhetoric going on. One is the Ahmadinejad, Holocaust-denying, pro-Hamas, pro-Hezbollah line. That will be gone completely. One of the things coming out of these protests is people saying, "We don't want the bomb." There's also this historical anti-Semitism that's existed as long as there have been Jews on earth, although the excuse that people in Iran have is limited access to correct information. But whoever comes to power has to break with the past.

This is where a healthy relationship between the Muslim Middle East and Israel can begin. Israel has never intervened or meddled in the lives of Iranians themselves. If anything, because Iran and Iraq had such a lasting and damaging war, Iranians were very happy to see Israel bomb Iraq in the early '90s. Israel has never conducted a coup in Iran; the only legitimate grievance is the Palestinian issue. And now people are saying, "Whenever we see Palestinians bleed on the streets we are asked to take to the streets and protest for them. Now we are bleeding on the streets, where are they now?"

From "Revolution Renewed," Tabletmag.com, June 24, 2009

One "Shocking" and "Permissive" High School for Girls Spawns More

It started as a *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) girls' high school: long stockings, long sleeves, and (surprise!) Talmud studies for all. The Pelech High School in Jerusalem, now in its 42nd year, has come a long way since then—and gone a long way, too, as new branches and offshoots of the school continue to open in a wide range of Israeli communities.

Despite its modest dress code and tradition-bound pupils, Pelech was revolutionary from the start. Conceived as an alternative to the Orthodox Beit Ya'acov girls' schools, Pelech aimed to provide its pupils with a broader general education and a deeper Jewish education—starting with Talmud (*Gemara*) studies, unheard of at the time among Israel's religious schools for girls. It was only a couple of years till haredi leaders—shocked by Pelech's "permissive" curriculum—declared it off limits to their community. By this time, though, Pelech had been discovered by modern Orthodox parents in Jerusalem seeking a more open, egalitarian religious education for their daughters. Enter **Alice Shalvi**, Hebrew University professor and founder of the feminist Israel Women's Network, whose daughter decided in 1973 that she wanted to leave her high school and transfer to Pelech. Shalvi followed her daughter there, and during her long tenure as its principal, turned it into one of Jerusalem's leading educational facilities—an "experimental" religious secondary school characterized by creative and innovative teaching, democratic student government, social commitment, and the conviction that every field of knowledge and endeavor must be open to girls and women.

"Above all," declares **Shira Breuer**, Shalvi's successor and Pelech's current principal, "we strive for excellence. In Jewish learning and commitment, in academics, in ethics, and in graduates' contributions to Israeli society." No wonder, then, that Pelech-style institutions are proliferating, many of them initiated by Pelech graduates who are now parents and/or educators themselves. Some are independent branches patterned largely after the original Jerusalem facility, emphasizing the best training for the most select (and usually Ashkenazi) students. Others are more socially oriented, primarily serving religious Sephardi and Ethiopian populations.

Tami Ravitsky Biton, an '89 graduate of Pelech Jerusalem, lives in Yerucham and heads the town's Midreshet Kama, a pluralistic community school not formally associated with Pelech, but clearly under its intellectual and pedagogic influence. She explains their differences: "We're not elitist: we accept every girl who wants to study here. Kama wants to bring the best of Pelech—its values and educational opportunities—not only to our future leaders, but to the whole community—a diverse population of ethnic groups, each with its own traditions. We're in an ongoing dialogue with them. And since we start at 7th grade [unlike Pelech's 9th grade], we have six years to work with the girls."

And what of the "F" word? The feminism for which Pelech High School has been famed—and at times blamed—for more than a generation? Biton sums up the situation facing Pelech grads in many places: "Unfortunately, traditional communities see feminism as something foreign, a rebellion against the world of their grandmothers. I want to educate our pupils, to see them grow confident and independent, and to give them the tools they need for coping with the world they inhabit. But I don't call it feminism; I call it empowerment."

BARBARA GINGOLD

Hendon, the Jewish section of London, under scrutiny on the Lilith Blog

In Hendonistan, there's a message that's been circulated via email and posted on notice boards inside one particular shul. The black and red banner in this popular Orthodox London shul requests that girls and women maintain proper *halakhic* [Jewish legal] standards of dress in shul. They are to refrain from "low necklines, see-through and short-sleeve tops and short skirts." And finally, there is the classic plea "Please help us to preserve the *Kedushat Beit Haknesset.*" Yes, all that holiness resting on the errant elbow of a Hendon housewife.

from "Blaming the world's tragedies on women's immodest dress" by **Modesty Blasé** (a pseudonym) on the Lilith blog, July 9, 2009

Shira Breuer, principal of Pelech High School, Jerusalem. "The trophies are for sports," she says, a bit ruefully. "That's all the city gives trophies for."

More on Margaret Sanger

[In response to Lilith's article on the early reproductive rights movement, Spring 2009]
Dear Editor,

I am 95 years old and was brought up in an old-fashioned traditional Jewish family. In the twenties and thirties Jewish parents rarely discussed sex with their children.

I was married at 18 and had my first child at 20. My mother suggested that I go to a clinic in Manhattan run by Margaret Sanger. (I had never heard of her.)

I gladly went to the clinic. I remember it well. It was a brownstone house, run by doctors and nurses. They asked for a small fee. (If you couldn't pay, you got the supplies free.)

Margaret Sanger made my marriage free from unwanted pregnancies—as well as having a happier marriage. I was able to plan my pregnancies as well as becoming sexually liberated.

Ruth Turim, Great Neck, NY

Naming Is Powerful

The Kolech Religious Women's Forum in Jerusalem has chosen the official Hebrew title for a female rabbi: *rabba*. They did consider "Maharat," the title recently given to Sara Hurwitz, who completed full rabbinic training in New York. But "rabba," which is literally the female equivalent of the Hebrew word rabbi, is the term officially submitted to the Hebrew Language Academy in Israel.

"What does one call a woman dean in Hebrew, or for that matter a woman rabbi? Feminine endings can confuse or reclaim status, masculine ones empower and provoke. *Harav* (masculine) *Hadekanit* (feminine) hopes to do all the above!"

Rabbi Naamah Kelman, appointed Dean at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. Her title in Hebrew will be, indeed, "Harav Hadekanit."

Queen Esther As a Teenage Fighter

Esther's own identity—as a young woman, as a Jew, as queen, as defender and protector of the Jewish people—plays out in several different ways in the Purim story. This year, New York City Opera addresses all of these in a revival of **Hugo Weisgall**'s opera "Esther," mounted with contemporary visuals by Israeli photographer **Rachel Papo** (below left).

And literally, the voice of this Jewish woman carries the meaning of the story. "Esther's struggle to define herself becomes central (a declaration, 'I am Esther', is set in at least three radically different fashions as its implications change)," wrote New York Times critic **Edward Rothstein** when the opera premiered in 1993.

Home

a short story by ZEEVA BUKAI

YOU THINK ONCE YOU'VE CROSSED THE DESERT YOU WILL FIND FREEDOM; YOUR BELLY WILL BE FULL; YOUR BODY WILL FORGET HUNGER AND FEAR. AFTER MANY MONTHS YOU REACH THE SPOT WHERE THE AIRPLANE WILL TAKE YOU TO THE LAND AND YOU THINK IT WILL BE LIKE THE WORDS SPOKEN BY THE KAHENAT ON THE SABBATH, FULL OF MILK AND HONEY. YOU WILL TOUCH TREES AND HONEY WILL DRIP INTO YOUR CUP. YOU WILL SIT BY THE RIVER AND MILK WILL GUSH TOWARD THE BANKS AND YOU THINK YOUR BODY WILL FIND ITS HOME AND THAT YOU CAN FINALLY REST. YOU WANT SO MUCH TO REST, BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WAITING TO COME HERE AND YOU DO NOT FORGET THEM, NOT ONCE IN YOUR PRAYERS, NOT EVEN WHEN YOU SIT WITH YOUR CHILD ON THE TERRACE AND SMELL THE SEA. YOU SMILE, BUT YOU DO NOT FORGET.

When the plane lands, you nearly fall out in your hurry to kiss the ground your ancestors kissed. And the scented air is what you dreamed of when you crossed the Sudan—full of sweet promise. You meet the Israelis who tell you they only speak the holy tongue and that you must learn. They send you to school, like you are a child. But you are old. You point to your gray head to make them understand. The Israelis, who are smarter than you because they went to school and brought you here in their airplanes, believe you know nothing of the world and prod your shoulder to get you to move from one place to another, so that you wonder if crossing the desert has turned you into a goat. They find someone who speaks your language and he takes you to a place where buses shuttle people all over the countryside. You are glad there is a market nearby, but only men sell vegetables there. You do not understand why they would do women's work. And for the first time you wonder what you will do with your days now that you no longer need to walk across the sand.

The man who speaks Amharic brings you to this place. This is your home, he says. You must show him you can open the door with the key. At night you sleep on a mattress that fights your body, not like the sand in the desert that held you, not like the straw mat you shared with your husband that rustled with each movement. You find you miss the dirt beneath your feet that was home. You try hard not to think of the husband you left behind, but at night when the city dies to a whisper, you remember the feel of his hands drawing you to him.

You ask the man who speaks Amharic if there are spirits here, and should you bring a priest to cleanse the rooms? He tells you there are no spirits in the land, only God. But when you look out the window and see buses spitting clouds of black smoke, vendors shouting and people running, you see spirits everywhere and wonder can this place where nothing ever stops to rest be home?

MARKETPLACE

When she asks, you tell your child you are happy. But inside your body there is a rock pulling you to the ground. So you go to the market. You see a few black faces like your own and you greet each other politely and move on. Everything is rush-rush here and always buying-buying to make up for what you did not have at home.

Because no one speaks your language, you point to what you want: the eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers. You will make a stew for supper and hope your daughter will be home to eat it. Always cooking too much, as if your husband and sons were with you. And as the thought of food and family enter your head, you see the face of your boy before your eyes. You see Mengistu's men in their gray camouflage fatigues, their rifles cocked as they steal your son. Your husband tries to stop them, but he is sick and old. When he rises up against them, they laugh and slap him down. But you hold on to the boy who is crying your name. A soldier presses his rifle to your head. You think because it is metal it should be cold, but it is a brand against your skin. You remember that your youngest son is hidden in the root cellar, between the baskets of onions and yams, and let go of your first born. And you remember smoke stinging your eyes as huts are burned to the ground, the sound crackling like the keening of old women. In Gondar Province you are no more than straw. The thought of your son in Mengistu's army turns your feet to lead. The thought of your boy with a gun in his hands squeezes your heart. You ask God to keep him alive. You ask for half a kilo of red lentils and white beans for soup.

Your mind plays tricks because even while you walk through the market that swells with music and shouting and engines running, you are sitting with your husband and children on the carpet upstairs in the room the authorities gave you, a feast before

photos by JOAN ROTH

you and all of you eating with your fingers. It is how you prefer to eat, but you have no strength to fight your daughter who tells you the Israeli way is to sit at the table and eat with utensils. Your hands, which embroider stories onto the bodice of a dress, feel like bricks when they hold a knife and fork. Only Arabs sit on the floor, your daughter says. Maybe I am Arab, you tell her. She laughs, then we could have stayed in Wallaka.

The vegetable vendor charges too much money and you shake your head and begin to walk away. He calls you back. You know this game. You have played it since you were a girl carrying a basket of fruit on your head–your body a slim reed swaying down the dirt path. The man who would one day be your husband stares until you feel there are ants crawling over your skin. The vendor calls you *Falasha*. But the word has no sting. He is right. You are a stranger here just as you were in Gondar Province. He calls you *kushi*. You nod, yes you are black, blacker than he. But soon he gives you the price you want. You take your basket and place it on your head. People stare. You keep your eyes down so as not to attract the evil eye. You miss the way you could step outside your hut and greet your neighbors and they would ask if you slept well and how were your husband and children and what a pretty robe you have on today.

Certainly, you are happy, you tell your daughter. After all it took to come here, you are finally home.

SAND BLIND

There are days when you forget where you are. Not even the sounds and smells of the market remind you. All you remember is sand–a river of it beneath your feet and waves of people, hundreds, maybe more marching in one direction. The journey begins with crying children. Mothers sob. Fathers shout. You tell your son and daughter to keep their heads covered. After the first twenty kilometers, everyone is too tired and too hungry to protest what they cannot change. They simply walk. There are two stops before nightfall, to eat, drink and relieve yourself.

The quiet surprises you. At first, you find it peaceful. But then you recognize it for what it is–the sound of your fear. Everyone carries their precious bits on their backs, some even bring their goats, believing they will be a boon on the journey. But soon the goats lie in the sand, and before they die, their masters slaughter them and dry their meat and eat well for a month. You used to think it was merciful to kill a suffering animal. Now you wonder if what it really wanted was to be saved.

You still have your precious bits. There is the picture of your husband, your sons and daughter. Next to them you place the gold bracelet your husband gave you as a wedding gift, a goatskin your father added to your dowry and a small book of prayer that belonged to your aunt. You tied these bits in a cloth and dragged them across the desert. You wish now you could have brought something else here.

When you crossed the desert you made sure to hold your son's hand. You love this boy. You knew he could be strong in this land; you made the journey. Mengistu took your older boy, so you thought, now I will thwart that man and take my son from this place. He is mine, you said, forgetting he belonged to God.

Even at night you see sand. You feel it shift under your feet and are drawn back into the desert with your son and daughter. You lift your son onto your back. Your knees buckle at his weight. He is a big boy. Your daughter looks at you with pity. She knows what you refuse to see and walks ahead, her back straight, then bowing into the wind. When you stop to rest, you do not meet the hunger in her eyes, and take care not to look at your son's gray face. You are a master at not seeing. Your eyes travel the familiar

past. They gaze into the future, and are shut to the present. You wonder if you have always been this way—sand blind.

You make your way to the refrigerator in the dark and want to weep at the sight of all the food. You take out the butter and bread, the cheese and tomatoes, the milk and hot peppers and and sit on the floor in front of the open refrigerator, the light sharp in your eyes and you eat, though you are not hungry. You eat for the boy you saved from Mengistu's gun.

THE RIVER

You watch your daughter cross the room and think she wears the clothes of Israel real good–the blue jeans, the tricot shirt. She is a western miss now. And though you smile at her happy face, you miss the girl you brought here–the skinny, angry child who thought you loved her brothers more, who helped you make *injera*, who poured the dough thin, and watched the pan while it cooked, who smiled when you weren't looking and cast dark looks when you were.

She is a beauty and you worry about the business of marriage. With no man around, who will take care of the dowry? Here we are scattered from Tel Aviv to Beersheva. How will she find a husband? You tell her you won't live in Beersheva–a city built on sand. No more deserts, the voice inside you shouts. She tells you, don't worry Ma. I'm Israeli now. No need to marry quick.

These matters were simpler in Wallaka. Her father would have found her a boy to marry and the families would have built them a hut. Sometimes you miss the village so much your bones ache. You miss the cluster of huts, the sound of the loom, the thump of a mallet on tin. You miss the women of your village. You miss the walks to the river, the way you sat braiding each other's hair and rubbing nut oil into each other's feet, and the talk, how you joked about young brides and about aging husbands. In your heart you wished for a younger man, but this one made you happy–sometimes.

At sunset you sit with your daughter on the verandah. "It's beautiful," she points to Tel Aviv. You nod your head. Yes it is beautiful, the white box buildings, the rooftop antennas like black arms stretching into the sky, but your mind is far away. It is with the river that winds around the village. It is on the path to the bathing spot. You know each tree and bush on this path. Your feet curl into the mud. You take off your robe and feel the morning air crisp on your skin. You belong there, hidden by those trees, walking into that river. Your body sinks under the water. On this day you will be washed clean. You open your eyes and see the wavering sky above you. The prayer rises from your lips like threads to the green surface. You rise all at once and stand pure before God and your village.

The children greet you with fierce hugs and chirp like birds. It was a long week, they say. For me too, you say. Your husband nods his head and tells you he will be back by sundown. You know he is going to the river. At night when he comes to you he smells of the grasses that grow near the banks.

You watch your daughter cross the room and wonder what she will do without the river to cleanse her, without the women of the village to ease her. Who will rub nut oil into her skin? Who will braid her hair when you are gone?

SHOES

Today they give your daughter a new name. You watch her step up to the podium in the auditorium at the agricultural school where she has learned to be a bookkeeper. Her head is full of numbers now and ideas about money, how much she will need to buy a car, an apartment, a dress she has seen in the mall that will make her look *eser*–a "10." Another number. You tell her, your future husband will buy these things for you, and she rolls her eyes. Lately, you feel foolish talking to this child.

She sits with her friends. All the girls and boys are glowing in their best clothes, their short skirts, and tall shoes, their black slacks and white shirts. They are happy to shed their Ethiopian names for Israeli ones. A teacher announces that from this day forth these children of Israel will be known by their new Hebrew names. The teacher calls your daughter Tali. She tells you the meaning of this name is morning dew. Your heart shouts for her to stop, but you are a stone in that seat, you and the other parents whose children are being reborn. And of course, you cannot help thinking of the day she was born, how she struggled to be free of you even then. Your mother said to you, this one is lively, call her Nikahywot, source of life. She will rejuvenate you in your old age.

Nikahywot, you whisper to the walls of your empty apartment. When she comes home for dinner you call her by her birth name. At first she doesn't answer and then she sighs.

Do you know what this street is called, she asks.

There is a sign on the corner, you tell her.

YOU TALK WITH YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTERS. "THESE ARE NOT OUR DAUGHTERS," SOMEONE CALLS OUT. "THESE ARE ISRAELI GIRLS." THE WOMAN PARADES DOWN THE AISLE, TWITCHING HER HIPS. ALL OF YOU LAUGH. IT IS A GOOD DAY.

Not the name the municipality gave it, she says, but the one it's known by.

You shake your head.

They call it the street of shoes.

But there are no shoes here.

Not anymore, she says, but there used to be. Everything changes fast here, Ma, but underneath it is still the same.

Late at night you peer out the window and imagine yourself as a young woman on this street. You smell the leather and glue in the air. It is the smell of prosperity. You see shoe stores and shoe factories. The street is busy with shoppers. Everyone here wears shoes. You look down at your bare feet and remember them sinking into mud and sand, and small rocks cutting your soles. You put on your daughter's shoes. The heels are high. You sway like a leaf falling off a bough. You straighten your back and look at your long legs and then you sit on the window ledge. For the first time, you are really here, in this place, in your daughter's shoes. Tali, you whisper, trying on the name. She is asleep, your newborn child. The street of shoes murmurs its goodnight and, like your village that held onto its ghosts, you hear the ghosts of this place calling.

PAPER

Because you are new to this land, they take you to Jerusalem. The authorities hire a driver and a guide who speaks Amharic. You sit on a bus with the other women. Some are from your village and though you might not have liked them in Wallaka, you love them here. Today they come from as far as Dimona and Beersheva. You have not seen them for so long that you fall into each other's arms. Your voices reach the treetops when you greet one another and you realize with a start that you are happy.

When you are together you remember home and the people you left behind. You talk of your children and when the words are too painful, you whisper their fate. The guide points out the sights. "These are our monuments–here since 1948." You see a rusted tank, an upended jeep, a pine forest. "Today," the guide says, "you can pray for your family and God will listen." He gives out scraps of paper for you to write the names of your ancestors on, your husband, your children. "Roll them until they are no bigger than a pebble and press them between the stones of the wall. God will read them."

You write the name of your husband and ask God to heal him and bring him here soon. You write the name of your daughter and wish for her a good man and many children. Then you write the names of your sons, the boy you carried in the desert, the boy you gave up to war and you wonder again for the hundredth time if you could have saved them. You stare out the window, the rolled bits of paper crushed in your hand.

There are days now when you forget Wallaka. You forget the cluster of huts, the river, your children's laughter, your mother braiding your hair, the mat where you slept beside your husband, the heat of his body, the smell of burning straw, the blacksmith's ring, the clack clack of the loom. You forget the way night descended all at once, as if the day were swallowed whole. You forget everything when you see Jerusalem.

Your friends sing the song, "*BaShana HaBa'ah*, Next year you will see how good it will be." You clap with them and wave to the pedestrians on the street as you ascend to the holy city. Your eyes well at the sight. This is King David's city, the guide tells you. When you stand before the Wall squeezing your life between its stones, you weep. It has taken all your days to get here. Now I am happy, you say. But inside, where your thoughts are dark, you think if my boys were here then this would truly be a holy place.

The guide takes you to the Machane Yehuda market where you buy fresh bread and sweet dates rolled in coconut. He takes you to a restaurant where the menu is in Hebrew and Amharic. You eat *injera* and stew. You talk with your women friends about your daughters and how different they are from you. "These are not our daughters," someone calls out. "These are Israeli girls." The woman parades down the aisle, twitching her hips. All of you laugh. It is a good day.

The apartment is empty when you get home. You don't bother turning on the light until you reach the main room. You know these walls by now; they guide you. "Tali," you call, knowing she isn't there. She has left a note on the table. "Ma, be home at 10," it says.

What freedom these daughters have. This is what comes of having no man. Your thoughts stray to the hours you spent with your women friends. You are free too, you tell yourself. No cooking, no cleaning, no man.

You rip the scrap of paper in two. On one piece you write the name of the son you lost in the desert. On the other, the name of the son in Mengistu's army. You write their names in Hebrew, so God will recognize them. You roll the bits of paper into a tight scroll. These are your chosen ones, you tell Him. You chisel a small hole in the wall, big enough for your pinky to slip into, and push the scroll inside it. You pray for the soul of your boy in heaven. You pray God is watching your son—your soldier. Don't let him die, you beg, don't let him kill, don't let him hurt, or be hurt. You pray these words until every bit of your flesh feels stretched like a drum skin.

Night falls slowly. You step out onto the verandah, stare at the quiet street below and feel the presence of all those who came and went. The lights of Tel Aviv shine like eyes in the dark. You sit in your chair and wait for your daughter to come home. ■

Zeeva Bukai is a writer and teacher living in Brooklyn. Most recently, her work has appeared in Calyx and The Jewish Quarterly.

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TISHRE

by YISKAH ROSENFELD

Every evening the night forgives the day its sins
and the day sleeps cradled and dreamless;
and each morning the day forgives the night
even its darkest corners of trespass
and the night wanders on dreams of light and wind.

This is the secret of the workings of the world
first seed planted in the primordial deep
first lesson of the divine when it stepped
out of itself onto the slick, dark lid
of otherness.

Today I crack that seed open with my teeth
my heart dividing like dry earth
suddenly seeped through with muddy everything: ocean
and birdsong and things like loss and love that creep,
the world wet and new as in the first days of creation.

Today I forgive the parts of myself that did not grow,
the parts already lain to rest,
I forgive the One who counted to a billion and then forgot to seek
and I forgive my heart its hardest and its softest ways
wound after wound reveals and I forgive them all

until I feel myself empty at the end of the day, sleek,
held between two lights that love each other well.

Yiskah Rosenfeld teaches workshops in Jewish text, ritual, and creativity in the San Francisco Bay Area.

WHENEVER I AM HUNGRY

by JUDY NERI

Whenever I am hungry
they crowd past me,
gaunt shadows elbowing each other,
rushing toward the tables.

The tables are many, rude wooden slabs,
peasant tables with bread, cheese and wine,
homey kitchen tables covered with oilcloth
or rococo dressed in white linen, platters
piled high with roasts, au gratin potatoes, peas;
for dessert, tortes lathered with crème fraiche.

The weakest want only soup, dream
of it steaming, the lone carrot, a few bits
of chicken floating in the broth, a crust
of bread to hold in their mouths a long time,
one slice of apple they dare not yet eat.
They would fall to the floor,
to grab the few noodles I dropped.

Sometimes, when they are working
in the fields or digging graves,
they break into their food oratorio,
soprano, alto, tenor, bass—tones
rising, falling, blending, in the endless
chant of fruit, of toast with jam, eggs,
coffee, oranges, schnitzel, schnapps,
over and over to fill their emptiness.

Alone or in dreams I see them,
old and young, staring.
These shades live in my kitchen,
perhaps in all our kitchens.
They are the kitchen ghosts.
Their bony fingers gesture
as I go to my bursting cupboard.

They are an itch, a wound in my mind,
a hollowness in my stomach.
They ask me for their peace.
Their peace? I can only give them
a place here, next to me, at my table.

They linger, weeping softly
bodies half turned away.
They stand quietly, shuffle,
cry out at the screech of a cabinet door,
bob in prayer before the ark of food.

At first I wanted them to go.
Now I know I cannot live
without them. I would shrivel
into empty egg shells,
a mushroom growing on garbage
in our sumptuous dumps.

So I thank them for their presence.
If only I could feed them,
turn back time! I bow to them.
They are holy,
witnesses
to the abyss
within us.

Judy Neri, the author of the book of poems Always the Trains *(New Academia Publishing, 2008), also writes memoir and essays.*

WHY

FEMINISM

IS A MODEL FOR

JEWISH MEN NOW

guest editor SARAH BLUSTAIN

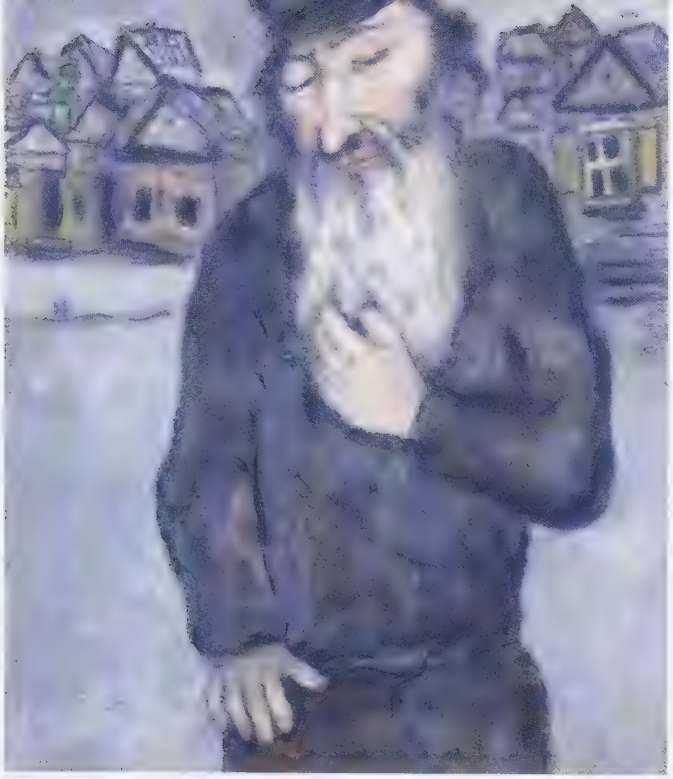
What you are about to read are the musings of four men on remarkable journeys—journeys to give back power. It's the old kind of male power they are handing back—the kind of power that came from being inside the walls of the male-dominated synagogue, or, happily, outside the confining, distaff walls. They want to be free from Manhood in its old-fashioned form.

Their voices are powerful and compelling. Reading them, I wonder: Did the "free to be you and me" generation help mainly women, who were freed to live in a world of varied choices—to work or not work, to cook or not cook, to birth or not to birth—and, for Jewish women, to demand a female face on religious practice and faith? Did women's lib, by some incredible, ironical, twist of fate, leave men confined? In their search for new ways to be men, these radical authors join others in the larger culture who are demanding change for men (and, gladly, not in reactionary ways). These authors, it turns out, are looking to Jewish tradition for models of a softer manhood; and they are looking to women, and to feminism, for models for their revolution.

I admit: In a certain slant of light I read these words with bitterness. Free, I say? *You*—lucky members of one of the world's original patriarchies—want to be free? And you want help, you say, from Jewish *women*? Weren't those centuries of help enough?

Still, these are questions of Passover's wicked son, who sets himself apart from the effort at hand. And, when the light slants the other way, I know that they are the wrong questions. The future of men's liberation is deeply entwined with women's liberation, Jewish and not. If our empowerment—be it in the halls of Congress or the halls of yeshiva or the halls of our homes—has been incomplete, it is because *their* liberation has barely begun. It may be the ultimate feminist undertaking in the coming decades to help men free themselves—and to demand that they do so in ways that continue to free us as well.

Sarah Blustain is a senior editor at The New Republic.



MISSING...

by MELANIE WEISS

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BE A JEWISH WOMAN IN AMERICA. But to be a Jewish *man* in America today, you can expect not much more than the same old, same old.

So what, you wonder? After all, the same old was pretty good for Jewish men for millennia. But today membership in the boys' club has fewer privileges, and, partly as a result, Jewish men are dropping out. Across America, in all denominations of non-Orthodox Judaism, men and boys seem to be disappearing from religious life. Reports of their shortage come from all corners: youth and adult educators, seminary professors, clergy and synagogue attendees. Women outnumber men at Hillel gatherings on campus, in applicants for rabbinical school, and at Jewish summer camp. "Jewish boys and men have fewer connections to Jews and Judaism than girls and women in almost every venue and in every age, from school-age children through the adult years," comments Sylvia Barack Fishman, professor of contemporary Jewish life at Brandeis University, who has been studying the trend.

Larger surveys over the last decade confirm that this is true. The study "Being a Jewish Teenager in America," published in 2000 by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, at Brandeis University, showed that, following bar mitzvah, Jewish boys drop out of formal Jewish education at a far faster rate than do girls. The 2001 National Jewish Population Survey showed that not only are Jewish men more likely than women to intermarry, but that that trend is tied to a weaker sense of Jewishness. And by 2005, the rabbinical school of the Reform movement's primary seminary, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, was reporting a two-to-one ratio of women to men in their incoming class; among Reform educators, nearly 90% are female.

Most recently, last year Barack Fishman published "Matrilineal Ascent/Patrilineal Descent: Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life," in which she contended that Jewish men and boys are fast fading out of organized Jewish social and religious life. Girls outnumber boys in Reform movement youth activities, sometimes constituting 78 percent of all attendees, while in Reform families with two born-Jewish parents, mothers are twice a likely to go to weekly services as fathers. According to the report's interview data, women in general, Jewish and non-Jewish, are more likely to identify as "religious" than men are.

"The majority of American Jews espouse equality as an important value, but Jewish life today is not gender equal," Barack Fishman explains in the monograph. "When it comes to gender equality or gender balance, contemporary American Jewish life is caught between a rock and a hard place"—between a patriarchal Orthodoxy and a liberal Judaism that is "visibly and substantially feminized."

For feminists who have fought for a place at the table, the development of an organization called "Men of Reform Judaism"—the new incarnation of the 80-year-old National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods—or the Conservative movement's "Beer and Bible" groups for men would be almost a parody: first came the Sisterhoods, then the feminist seders because, it was understood, the rest of Judaism was basically arranged for the benefit of men. But increasingly Jewish leaders are realizing that they just may need something resembling a Jewish feminism—for men.

Still, not all feminists are so comfortable with the attention on boys and men. Lori Lefkovitz, professor of Gender and Judaism at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and founding director of Kolot, the Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies, believes that much of the current discussion of boys and men may be "pushback" against women's gains. "Women's enfranchisement within Judaism has not yet been normalized," she explains, and although some people may be discomforted by an increased women's presence, she cautions against creating a "gender competition. When we envision the system as a competition rather than cooperation, we do a disservice to the entire Jewish enterprise," she says. "We're not in this as men and women. We are in this together as a mutually-dependent collectivity."

Barack Fishman acknowledged that people have avoided discussing the problem "because they are afraid that the topic itself can be used as a weapon against women." But she hopes that the problem of male disengagement from Judaism will be seen as a "problem for the entire Jewish people, just like the problem of women's exclusion was." ■

GENDER AFTER FEMINISM

by RABBI STEVE GREENBERG

I AM A GAY ORTHODOX FEMINIST AND, PERHAPS FOR THIS VERY REASON, I AM CONFUSED BY GENDER. Despite the role delineations of the Orthodox world, I have ingested enough popular feminism to be able to distinguish between sex and gender. I get it that, formally speaking, "sex" refers to biology and "gender" to the characteristics that a culture delineates as masculine or feminine. What I don't get is how I continue to use the words "masculine" or "feminine" as if they mean something real.

Most of my feminist education began when I started doing the research for a book I wrote about Judaism and homosexuality. I began to understand not only that gender is socially constructed, but that the masculine/feminine divide was more like a continuum. In the process of writing I came to see gender prior to feminism as a compulsory and unforgiving social order that marked women beneath men in terms of power and value, and that marked gay people as direct threats to the system. The notion that men and women as groups are or should be something, and that, by definition, whatever one group is the other isn't, has proven to be both false and destructive.

And yet, (this is the confusing part) I admit that I succumb to the feeling, be it based on science, ideology or bad faith, that men and women are wired differently, that we are not only different sexually, but that there are differences in the way we think, behave, feel and relate. And because there are differences, there are unique accomplishments, experiences and sensibilities in single-sex communities that cannot be achieved in mixed environments.

Which leads me to the paradox of my *shul* life.

I live in New York City and attend a number of different Orthodox synagogues, from the hip to the hasidic. Two in particular are my regular haunts, and they are polar opposites regarding women. One makes a point of women's presence and participation; in the other, women are literally invisible. I love them both.

Darkhei Noam is the New York version of Shira Hadasha, the first "partnership *minyan*," created in Jerusalem by Tova Hartman and Elie Holzer. It offers an enlivened *davening* experience and the fuller participation of women with-

in an Orthodox framework. The prayer space is divided by a *mechitza*, a sheer white curtain that separates the men and women. The small *shtender* (the lectern from which prayer is led), is moved from one side of the veil to the other while the *bima* is situated on the boundary, at perfect center, breaking the curtain for a short space. From these movable and liminal spaces, men lead *maariv*, *shaharit* and *musaf* (the three traditional daily prayer services), women lead *kabbalat Shabbat* (the Friday evening service) and *pesukei de-zimra* (opening morning psalms), and both run a fully egalitarian Torah service.

My first experience of this sort of prayer experience was in 1996. I had just arrived in Israel for a two-year fellowship and, in a fog of jet lag, listened for the first time as a female voice led *Lecha Dodi* from the other side of the *mehitza*. I was blown away. It was as if the *shekhinah* had suddenly shown up at the prayer service that mystically is all about her. At that moment, the Zohar's notions of exile and reunion within the godhead were no longer ideas. The experience was transformative. The feminine face of God had returned to take us with her in her weekly Sabbath re-union with the Holy One. I was in tearful ecstasy.

To be honest, over time the intensity of this Jerusalem experience has worn off. Still, there is a quality of spiritual expansion that permeates the davening. At Darkhei Noam women always lead those services that (halakhically speaking) they are permitted to lead. This means that women regularly run the service that opens the ark, uncover the Torah and return it to the ark. This may seem like a minor affair, but this shift in ritual practice, the physical movement of the scrolls in the arms of women, affects the very meaning of Torah, its revelation and reception. As women's voices are added to the male voices during the reading, scripture blossoms into something fresh and new. This more whole ritual frame fits my longing for a community that erases no one; my partner and I are beneficiaries of the minyan because it is one of the few places where we feel totally part of a living shul community.

However, on plenty of *Shabbos* mornings, instead of heading off to Darkhei Noam, I roll out of bed and end up at the Vorhand *shtiebel*. Vorhand is not egalitarian in any way. It is a virtual men's club. Women, when they come, are in a room connected to the main *shul* by a tiny curtained window; few show up on regular Shabbat mornings. Vorhand is very small prayer space with tables and bookshelves and a wooden ark. The feel is much more like a *beis midrash* (a yeshiva study hall) than a synagogue. The aesthetic, if one could call it that, is like the one-room schoolhouse from which the Yiddish word "shul' is derived. No attention is paid to beauty or style or even color. Nothing adorns the walls but shelves of sacred tomes. For anyone in Orthodox culture, such a place reads as male because only men have the duty to learn Torah day and night.

The absence of wives in this shtiebel *setting makes the differences between married and single men, or between gay or straight men, much less apparent.*

At Vorhand, I have my *makom kavuah*, my seat that, if I come on time, is always there for me. I open my *siddur* and find myself in another world of intentional prayer. It is a place where I can wander in and out of psalms, rock to my own rhythm, sing out when I feel it, dwell on a word when it stops me. It offers a very sweet private encounter with the Divine, and yet it is a very intense communal engagement too. Men of different ages, in very different religious modes, rub shoulders, shmooze, make jokes, share interpretive glosses of the Torah reading, and hang out over the davening experience. It is also a very sparse service. It starts at 9:50 A.M. and is usually over before noon, roughly two hours, plus or minus. There is a macho feel to this clip that might seem to work against feeling. Sometimes it does, but most often it creates instead a sense of sleek religious competence.

A huge part of the experience at Vorhand is the kiddush. Cake and *schnapps* arrive on the tables (delivered by a group of designated men) moments before the end of the service, followed by kiddush and a *geshmak* potato kugel and a cholent. Typically there is some jockeying between the bourbon and the Scotch lovers—to the disdain of a hardened few hasidim who cannot imagine anything better than vodka.

Vorhand and other minyanim like it are a mix between a sports team and a priestly brotherhood. The prayer space has qualities of a locker room, a ball field and the Temple court in Jerusalem. Skills in execution are rarely taught formally; one learns by listening and watching those who know what to do. It is a brotherhood that mentors the young and that honors commitment, grit and competence. The culture of this sort of *shtiebel* mentality grows out of a sense of personal duty that is a sort of *noblesse oblige*: Men pay the price of showing up unfailingly to serve God for the benefit of the whole community; by doing so, they lay claim to their various male privileges. A number of the hasidim use the mikvah in the basement (a locker room of sorts) not after but before the game, coming into the prayer space with wet hair like ancient priests ready for the daily sacrifice. In the mix of elements, the Vorhand shul is its own, quite athletic male-centered spiritual world.

As a gay man I am only a bit askew in this guy's haven. From my early days at yeshiva I discovered a community of men who in my secular upbringing did not exist. In this environment, the competition is intellectual and the desired female is the holy Torah. The common absence of wives in this *shtiebel* setting (I've only once met the rabbi's wife) makes the differences between married and single men, or between gay and straight men, much less apparent. I am not quite "out" in Vorhand. (My partner doesn't find the service satisfying so he doesn't come along.) Some members of the congregation are aware, but most are completely oblivious. In my conversations with the regulars around my table it has come up obliquely without any obvious shock or horror. However, I heard through the grapevine that a key member of the shul challenged the rabbi about my presence and he stilled the complaint with "if we demanded *tzidkus* [perfect righteousness] here, then who would make the *minyan*?"

When I daven at Vorhand I often do feel like I have left my principles at the door. If

Vorhand would admit that the shul does not represent the whole community in prayer but just the men, it would make a huge difference. Were that the case, a separate woman's *shtiebel* might be conceivable. Then the women I discourage from joining me at the Vorhand *shul* would have their own rich, gendered prayer world to belong to.

Is it possible that there could be a female Vorhand? There are now many Orthodox women, trained in day schools, who are unbearably frustrated with audience status and are fully competent to take on the challenges of elite duty. But many of the original Orthodox women's prayer groups that began some 20 years ago could not sustain themselves. Could it be that this particular form of community is tied to the needs of men? Perhaps I am deluding myself, blithely enjoying the fruits grown in what can only be described as patriarchal soil and innocently attempting to claim to be a feminist nonetheless.

So here are my two prayer worlds in all their incongruence. When it comes to gender after feminism, I am ambivalent. I want it both ways, equality and difference.

I admit that I may well be stuck in the transition between two social worlds as a casualty of my biography. My friends who have created Hadar, a fully egalitarian alternative prayer service in New York City, gently chide me in just this way. For them, being egalitarian is like being pregnant: there are no half measures.

I am ambivalent. I want it both ways, equality and difference.

Perhaps they are right, and yet I have a nagging sense that my ambivalence is much more troublesome than either neurosis or simple bad faith. Studies keep discovering that sexual difference is not only in the morphology of our genitalia, but everywhere in our bodies and most profoundly in our brains. Nature has not made us equal in capacities, and consequently justice can often seem to be at odds with the body.

Of course, even if some of the putative differences between men and women are grounded in biology, it still does not follow that we ought to organize society around such distinctions: Doing so limits even the most normative males and females and brutally oppresses the outliers. But while our obedience to the gender code is much more costly to us and our children than we ordinarily admit, I come back to the sense that the world would be decidedly less nuanced, less beautiful, less gloriously passionate and also less painful without gender. Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity*, suggests that our belief in "democracy, equality, consensus-building, compromise, fairness, mutual tolerance result[s] in very boring sex." If she is right, if sexual excitement is politically incorrect, if it thrives on power plays and unfair advantage, then despite the fact that egalitarianism is one of the greatest advances of modern society, maybe we ought to reign in our moral compunctions a bit and live with the irony of it all.

So what is masculinity after feminism? Could the Vorhand minyan survive under the clear skies of full-fledged gender equality? Probably not. And this small question about a small shul gets, in a way, to a much more central question: Is a tribal life of men—and for that matter, of women—worth sustaining, even after we have also found out how sweet wholeness is? Despite the moral dangers, I believe gender difference can demand a place in the life of the spirit and even play a role of some significance in the shaping of a sacred community.

A few weeks before I arrived in Jerusalem and had that 1996 epiphany, I saw the off-Broadway production of "The Vagina Monologues," Eve Ensler's one-woman performance of monologues by women about their vaginas. Toward the middle of this sexy, painful, moving and funny work, Ensler describes a 50-year-old woman who had never in her life seen her own vagina. I was frozen in my seat. Numerous times a day a man fiddles with his penis, takes it out to pee, and sees it in its various states. Ensler described this woman, sitting naked in a bath tub with a mirror, looking for the first time. I began to weep. It was a touching and stark picture of a long-delayed experience of female self-discovery, but in my mind it was a sign of a much larger movement in the world.

The male face of God has become a pedestrian encounter. It is the way we all have been taught to think and speak about God. Many times a day we invoke the King. The female face of God is much harder to get at. We are blessed to be living at a moment when finally, the *Shehinah* is coming out of hiding. She still cannot be seen directly, but only with mirrors. And if you want to see her well, you might just have to get naked.

In zoharic tradition the higher you rise in the emanations, the more integrated the opposites are; the lower, the more there is conflict and tension between poles. So, perhaps I should make this admission: My retreat into the *shtiebel* and its male-centered world must ultimately be the lower choice, while the integrated community, where men and women and their different spiritual competences are fully present, must be the higher. This seems right to me. And nonetheless, what makes the whole feel electrically charged and orchestrated rather than homogenized is the mehitza running down the center of the shul. That is what the mehitza means: Men and women are different.

This way of seeing the feminist revolution is then less about equality and not at all about leveling the genders to achieve equality. It is about welcoming the long awaited Feminine Face of God to the spiritual stage to join the King. Women's voices and power must be raised, not to end gender but to restore balance. Such a feminist revolution might be able to nourish two gendered communities, support men in their various *shtieblach*, spearhead the recovery or invention of female communities, and celebrate the joining together of everyone into a single community of worship that is by definition, greater that the sum of its parts. ■

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BOTTOMING FOR GOD

by JAY MICHAELSON

AND YOU KNEW WHO YOU WERE THEN/GIRLS WERE GIRLS AND MEN WERE MEN." So sang Archie Bunker—and for all we're taught in Hebrew school, "then" might as well mean in biblical times as in 1950s America.

But Archie's ideal does not reflect biblical reality. Deborah, Yael, Miriam, and Sarah are hardly demure "girls." And, doubtless reflecting Israel's self-perception as a weak nation surrounded by stronger ones, biblical texts frequently favor younger, wimpier, "effeminate" men over older, more traditionally "masculine" ones—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and so on. Indeed, in biblical text, "manly men" are fundamentally incomplete: To fulfill one's Divine mission as a male hero, one must become, in a sense, female—or more specifically, to use a somewhat explicit term from queer theory and experience, by learning to bottom for God. Here, I will explore two examples, the person who gives Israel its name, and the one who is its most famous king: Jacob and David.

The patriarch Jacob begins his life as the quintessential femme. He stays home and cooks, he's his momma's favorite, he's smooth, he's a twink. Esau is a hunter, hairy and manly. He is direct where Jacob is cunning, strong where Jacob is crafty. And yet, as we all know, Jacob, not Esau, is destined to father the 12 tribes; the femme-boy becomes the ultimate daddy.

Obviously, to do so Jacob must be transformed—an event that takes place the night he wrestles with the "man" late at night ("angel" is a later emendation). In many readings of Genesis 32, this is when Jacob "becomes a man." Like Henry V or Luke Skywalker, the boyish hero becomes everything he wasn't before: strong, violent, a man, manly.

Lurianic Kabbalah, however, reads Jacob's coming of age very differently: not as a rejection of his role as a "womanly" man, but an acceptance of it. (I am grateful to Rabbi Ohad Ezrachi for introducing these texts to me.) Following the Zohar, it understands Jacob's relationship with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, as a *tikkun*, a cosmic repair or completion, of Adam's relationship with his two wives, Lilith and Eve.

Both Jacob and Adam initially reject their hyper-sexualized and strong first wives: Jacob at first desires the "girly girl" Rachel, rather than the sexually assertive

Leah, just as Adam desired Eve the Bottom, not Lilith the Top.

Until that night of wrestling. There are many readings of what went on that night. In some, Jacob's wound is understood to be on the sexual organ, "leg" being merely a euphemism for the genitals (as in *mei raglayim*, "leg water," i.e., urine). In others, the wound to his sciatic nerve is understood as the result of a sexual assault on the buttocks. But whatever went on, Jacob is indeed transformed by a sexualized encounter with a mysterious "man." His new name, Yisra-El, means not only "Wrestles with God" but "God is victorious." God wins, I submit. God is on top, I am on the bottom. And after this episode, everything shifts. Rachel drops out of the story (she dies shortly thereafter), we hear no more about Leah being undesired, and Jacob is able to embrace, literally, his butch brother Esau.

In short, a femme man is exactly who Jacob is supposed to be in order to repair what Adam had broken, and engender the people Israel. He need no longer fear the sexually assertive Leah; he can bottom for her, and fulfill his destiny as progenitor of Israel. He can be the agent of God's action in the world because he has learned to bottom.

What the Bible — and the Jewish people — need is a femme man, like Jacob and David both.

The story of David develops this theme more fully. David, like Jacob, is a femme: a beautiful youth who plays the harp and carries Jonathan's armor. As brilliantly analyzed in Theodore Jennings' *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*, David's brief but passionate love affair with Jonathan prepares him for his destiny as God's lover. In both cases, David's role is that of the "armor-bearer"—universally understood in Mediterranean and Near Eastern literature as the younger, more beautiful, *eromenos*, or bottom—first to Jonathan's *erastes*, and second to YHVH's.

That David and Jonathan's relationship was, in part, sexual is beyond serious doubt; that is part and parcel of the warrior love convention. Saul knows this too, castigating Jonathan for choosing "the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?" (1 Sam 20:31) and teasing David for having married two of his children, i.e. Michal and Jonathan. (1 Sam 18:21) And of course the young men cry, embrace, and kiss (1 Sam 20:41), and David famously laments that Jonathan's "love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Sam 1:26).

Yet the story is ultimately about neither lust nor court intrigue. Ultimately, it is David's destiny to be God's *eromenos* even as he is Israel's *erastes*, and he must train for both roles. David stands between two lovers, God above and Israel beneath. (Invoking theosophical Kabbalah, David is *malchut*, the receptive-feminine-bottom for all of the Godhead, who in turn transmits the Divine influx below.) As king of Israel, David must play such a dual role in order to at once rule (over Israel) and be ruled (by God). And in order to do that, he must learn how to "carry the armor" of another man.

Jacob and David are surely the Bible's two greatest heroes: one the father of a nation, the other the outstanding king of it. Yet in stark contrast to what we today might expect of our male heroic figures, both become heroes when they learn, in sexual or sexualized encounters with other men, how to fulfill their destiny as bottoms. This is not to say that David and Jacob were "gay," a contemporary term that has no echo in biblical text. Rather, our Jewish heroes are, to use a loathsome but apt phrase, "pussy-boys," because only in this gender-fluid space can they be at once the tops of a nation and the ultimate bottoms for God. ■

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BOYS? WHY

Moving Traditions launched with programs for Jewish girls—for Rosh Hodesh groups and Bat Mitzvah celebrations. The organization's newest program is called "Campaign for Jewish Boys." Lilith editor in chief ***Susan Weidman Schneider*** *asked MT's founder and chair,* ***Sally Gottesman****, "Why?"*

SG: We know that boys and young men participate in Jewish activities less than girls do. One Hillel director told us that 80% of people participating in his campus's non-Orthodox programs are women.

SWS: Of course, there wasn't the same worry about participation when the numbers were overwhelmingly male! But what do you think is the reason now for this skewing?

SG: Men are dropping out, but not because women have come in—that's a canard! Women enter a field when the men are leaving. Take the rabbinate. Is it that women start to play in the game and then men leave? No. Men used to become rabbis because anti-Semitism kept them out of politics and CEO jobs. As that changed, being a rabbi wasn't as appealing. I think first a field becomes devalued and then women can come in. Judaism had already become devalued.

It becomes cyclical: fewer men participate, so it becomes less popular for other men, and then the next generation of boys has fewer role models of men participating.

SWS: What will help boys and men see Judaism as valuable? Your

BOYS?

research has found that Judaism provides some boys with resilience, and with an "alternative" masculinity.

SG: We need to provide space for boys to meet separately from girls, the way we make it available to girls and women to explore what Judaism has to offer. We want to find activities that draw on Judaism and give boys the opportunity to explore issues they care about—friendship, sex, power, money, work. …

One of our ideas for Moving Traditions was to do something with fathers and sons. We found that, for fathers who were not comfortable with their own Jewish identity, even though they wanted to spend time with their sons they did *not* want to do it in a Jewish context. A place where you're not comfortable is the last place you want to spend time with your son.

SWS: I'd bet that some of these dads fear they'll be less adept at Jewish activities than they are at work, or at play. There's an unfamiliar language, strange rhythms. Why put yourself at the bottom of the class? It's easier, it seems to me, for women to admit to ignorance. You can blame it on sexism or the lack of opportunity. The *system* is at fault. What's more, there's so much offered for women—adult bat mitzvah classes, challah-baking demonstrations, lectures on Bible women, the works—so remediation is readily available. Will Moving Traditions offer some of this to men and boys? For women there's the excitement of making discoveries, inventing new rituals. What can you imagine will elicit this kind of enthusiasm for men?

SG: A couple of examples: Right now, Brit Milah [*bris*] has changed because of Simchat Bat, the naming ceremony for a newborn daughter. Families are doing a bit more, not just having the mohel come in. Introducing the foremothers—Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca and Leah—into the liturgy has suddenly got men thinking about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in *relation* to these women—not just as isolated male figures.

SWS: The classic question used to be "What do women want?" Is there some danger—now that the focus is on what men and boys want—that progress on women's issues will be halted?

SG: I think that feminism is about helping women *and* men become full human beings, and we are inching slowly towards this. ■

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DAVID THE FATHER

by RABBI JEREMY KALMANOFKY

THE BIBLE'S MOST VIVID CHARACTER IS KING DAVID, WHOM IT IS EASY TO SEE AS THE PARADIGM OF MASCULINITY. We think of him as a ferocious fighter, a sweet musician, a loyal friend—and mighty popular with the ladies.

King David is also an extravagantly emotional father—belying the contemporary cliché that fathers are tough, unforgiving disciplinarians, while mothers are gentle, clement protectors. (Indeed, parental roles in the Bible can be seen as remarkably flexible, less defined than you might expect. Both parents are to be honored, as in the Ten Commandments, and revered.) No one loves his children more than King David, and only God is so boundlessly forgiving. The Bible's favorite hero embodies masculinity partly because of his great capacity for parental love.

Just think of the Absalom story (2 Samuel, chapters 13–20) to understand:

David's son Amnon had raped his half-sister Tamar. Either ignorant of the rape or overly clement, David fails to punish Amnon. Instead, Tamar's full brother Absalom, who is furious, kills Amnon and flees to another king for protection. David mourns for Amnon, but even more he is heartsick at Absalom's absence, and ultimately (borrowing a Christian image) brings this prodigal son home. Even when the child is a murderer, David embraces his son with love.

But even that is not the limit of David's love. Absalom, returned home, has too much charisma and ambition for his own good, and before long he has fomented a rebellion against his father. The once-great king now is driven into the desert, weeping and barefoot, his enemies pelting him with rocks and calling him names. David fights back, of course, but

instructs his generals to "treat this young boy Absalom gently... for me." When the battle rages, David seeks reports: "Is my boy Absalom safe?"

Young boy? Treat him gently? Is he safe? Absalom has driven David from the throne and is trying to kill him; he has drafted David's top adviser, Ahitofel, to the rebel side, not to mention that he has already slept with David's concubines. Why should David cut him any slack? Warlords don't cut slack!

In the end, Absalom dies dramatically: His hair is caught in a tree branch, and he hangs there "between heaven and earth," until he is stabbed and beaten to death by David's troops. When the king hears this awful news, he is disconsolate, moaning along his heart-breaking speech: "My son, my son, Absalom. If only I died instead of you.... Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son!"

David's generals, who have just risked their own lives to defend him, are astonished: "You are humiliating us!" they say. "You would have been happier if your own side lost, and we were all killed! You love your enemies and you hate your friends!"

King David's reply is absent from the text. I imagine he said nothing. Perhaps he thought: "You are my friends, but you cannot be my children." For the sake of the kingdom, he congratulated his soldiers, but I imagine his heart was not in it. At this moment, he did not care much for being David HaMelekh. He wanted his boy. ■

Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky is rabbi at Congregation Ansche Chesed in Manhattan, loves his two sons and two daughters, and prays they experience better fates than David's children.

EXILE FROM GUYVILLE: A REFLECTION

by PAUL ZAKRZEWSKI

SOMETIME IN THE MIDDLE OF HIGH SCHOOL I WAS CONFRONTED WITH RATHER IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE THAT I WASN'T MUCH OF A MAN.

Given this was the early 1980s—an era best remembered (and not without irony) for its androgynous male rock stars—you'd think that some gender latitude might have been in order. But latitude is typically not the case in the suburbs; especially not so in wealthy, overwhelmingly white ones like the southern Ontario town where I grew up. For reasons I've never understood, the wealthier and better educated the suburb, the less appetite there is for difference.

On this particular evening, my friend Syd (not his real name) and I had gone to the movies. Sitting in the theater, I had, without asking, reached into his enormous bucket of popcorn and extracted a handful. It was an impulsive move, even an aggressive one, or maybe it suggested to Syd a level of intimacy we hadn't achieved. The normally mild-mannered Syd frowned and threw me a hard look.

"If you weren't such a wimp, I'd punch you in the face right now," he said.

I stared at him with what must've been a stupid expression, but it was less the threat and more the truth of what he'd said that stung. A wave of dismay gripped my bowels. Syd was right. I was a wimp.

It's not like this had escaped my notice, exactly. I recall as far back as sixth grade, when one new boy managed to win over our class by mounting the monkey bars outside and, ropey muscles bulging, completed several chin-ups in quick succession. Then there was me: the chubby 12-year old who hated gym and anx-

I felt singled out for special torment by the mean girls of seventh grade, the ones who wedged their tiny hips into Jordache jeans.

iously counted the days to the dreaded "10 Minute Walk/Run," a government-mandated health test administered each spring and fall during middle school. I felt singled out for special torment by the mean girls of seventh grade, the ones who wedged their tiny hips into Jordache jeans and whose Farrah Fawcett curls flipped across the their foreheads as they mocked my oily hair and bargain-basement velour tops. Deep down I wondered if I was unlovable, and my cherubic features—the ones that Syd, among others, loved to point out—seemed the nexus of my failure to be hard and lean.

As my mother saw it, being pudgy was compounded by the sin of over-sensitivity, and she did her best to cure me of both. Around the time of my bar mitzvah she put me on a variety of diets, each one of which focused my attention ever increasingly on the very body I longed to ignore. Even to this day, she likes to tell my wife that I was a fearful boy who never did like climbing trees. "I just felt like I had to push you a bit," is my mother's response whenever we talk about my teenage years.

Beginning around adolescence, I began to form a secret life that included a fascination with archeology and detective stories and vampires. At the end of the particularly awkward years of early adolescence, as I entered high school, I discovered a talent for analyzing movies and books. These interests put me in touch with a culture and history beyond the narrow confines of my hometown. At the same time, my friendships with one or two boys—unconventional, smart, sensitive, rebellious boys—filled me with a sense that I wasn't entirely alone. By the end of high school I was itching to leave my home and hometown, certain the wider world had more understanding for the kind of man I was becoming.

Not surprisingly, my temperament and inclinations provoked a number of bullies along the way. From ages three to nine I lived in Mexico City, and it was there, in an abandoned lot across the street from my house, that an older boy once tried to push my face into a pile of dog shit. Trouble followed me to the British private school I attended, in the form of the only overtly anti-Semitic incidents of my life: name-calling ("Christ killer!"), shoving matches, and so on. And though Canada was very different in this respect, I still encountered bullying there too.

My father eventually learned about some, though not all, of these incidents. His face would turn very grave at moments like these, as if he'd encountered a particularly knotty passage of philosophy. He'd explain the psychological makeup of bullies, their self-hatred and so on, as if by understanding the problem I might make it go away. Once, early on, he told me to punch back "if you have to." Not surprisingly, I didn't find his advice about bullies of much help.

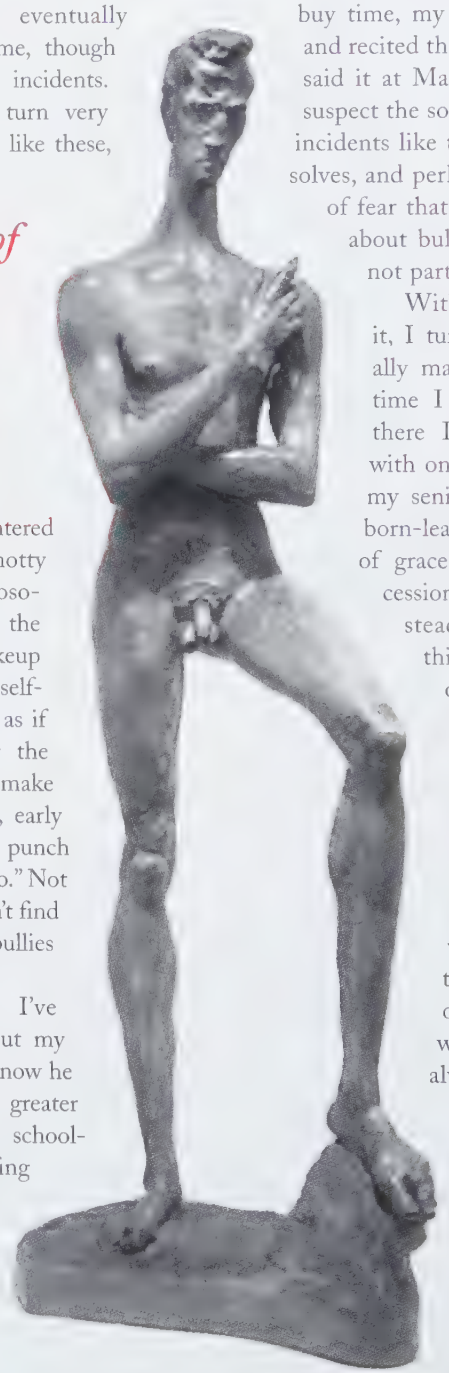
Now that I've learned more about my dad's early life, I know he had navigated far greater dangers than the schoolyard bully. During World War II, my father had been saved by his nanny, a righteous Catholic Pole named Genia, who gave him a false identity as her out-of-wedlock son. My father spent part of his time in a ghetto workshop, along with the other underage children of Jewish workers, and was occasionally forced to hide in the rafters, among bolts of cloths, whenever a Nazi inspection or *aktion* loomed.

In a number of instances my father was called upon to fake his Catholic identity—something he did with shrewdness that belied his age. The most memorable of these featured a pair of Polish blackmailers entering Genia's apartment and demanding to inspect my father. As she pleaded and cajoled the men in order to buy time, my father got on his knee and recited the Lord's Prayer as if he'd said it at Mass the Sunday before. I suspect the sort of fear you'd feel after incidents like these never entirely dissolves, and perhaps it was the memory of fear that kept my father's advice about bullies vague, abstract and not particularly helpful.

Without entirely realizing it, I turned to more traditionally masculine mentors by the time I got to college. It was there I became close friends with one guy, six or seven years my senior, who had a natural-born-leader's charisma and sense of grace; he slept with a succession of women, despite a steady girlfriend—something that struck me not only as dishonest but desperate, when I got to see the repercussions up close. Another older college buddy rode a Harley, snorted cocaine, and wasn't above the occasional violent confrontation to settle scores; among our mutual friends, he was sometimes—and not always jokingly—called the "Marlboro Man."

Sometimes I'd catch myself studying these guys, like a stranger in a new land, hoping to pick up the local customs

I learned to enjoy my particular brand of masculinity, one that encouraged other men to lower their guard around me, and yet I still felt, as I sometimes still do, like an outsider in the world of men.



to better blend in. What I didn't expect was that the observation went both ways. "I find it easy to talk to you," Marlboro Man once said to me as we drove up to his father's cabin in upstate New York. With me he could talk about his interest in abstract painting or his mixed feelings about his absent, hard-charging father. At moments like these I learned to enjoy my particular brand of masculinity, one that encouraged other men to lower their guard around me and be themselves. It was a masculinity of a different sort, and yet I felt, as I still sometimes do, like an outsider in the world of men.

One thing I have learned, however, is that I'm far from being the only man who feels as I do. Nearly two decades ago, Robert Bly's book *Iron John* brought to national consciousness a small network of retreats and self-help workshops. It was easy to skewer the Mythopoetic Men's Movement's hokier, New Age trappings: Images of well-fed weekend warrior types running semi-nude through forests played especially well in places like Time magazine. But when I encountered Bly's book I discovered that his arguments resonated with my own experience. Men need the approval and respect of other men—especially older men—whose presence at rites of initiation can help repair old wounds.

What Bly left out—and what rightly troubled some critics, including feminists like Betty Friedan—were the political implications of male consciousness-raising. Bly didn't see that the explorations he encouraged were intimately connected to changes brought on by the feminist movement, and was a reaction to women's liberation in all its senses.

Twenty years down the line, men of my generation are wrestling with even greater shifts in gender roles than ever before. Even as the tradition of male as sole breadwinner dwindles into memory, American men have assumed a greater variety of roles than perhaps at any other time. Today we are metrosexuals, smoothies, mannies (i.e. male nannies), SAHD (stay-at-home dads), and more. Some of these words signal simply the resurgence of age-old tropes—what is the metrosexual if not today's dandy?—while others, like SAHDs or the "gay vague" style of men's fashion, suggest a wholesale reinvention of traditional gender roles.

I don't know when and if men will come together to really talk through the enormous changes in masculine roles currently underway. Most striking to me, as a relatively new father, is gender "convergence," as new parents seek to more equitably split childcare and household chores. In the 1970s, sociologists found the average fathers spent a third as much time with children as mothers did; by 2000, the number had shot up to three-quarters. The men I know are still very much making it up as they go along, and this creates a whole new set of tensions that we're just beginning to explore. We're in the middle of a quiet revolution for men. ■

What are the political implications of male consciousness-raising?

Paul Zakrzewski is the editor of Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge. *His writings have appeared in* A Living Lens: Photographs of Jewish Life from the Pages of the Forward, *The New York Times, Boston Globe, Washington Post, The Forward, and elsewhere. He can be reached a pzak@rcn.com.*

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Moving Traditions, *MovingTraditions.org*

Men of Reform Judaism, *nftb.org*

Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs (of the Conservative Movement), *fjmc.org*

Keshet, working for the inclusion of GLBT Jews in Jewish life, hosts Massachussetts Men's Group: A discussion, social, and support group for gay, bi, trans, questioning, and queer Jewish men. *michail@keshetonline.org*

Men's Club at Temple Judea, Tarzana, CA: monthly meetings with Rabbi Dan Moskowitz for men to discuss "anything that makes them uncomfortable." *www.templejudea.com*

Nehirim, promoting GLBT Jewish Culture and Spirituality, is a resource for innovative thinking on Jews and gender: *www.nehirim.org*

For more resources, go to Lilith.org. Want to add a resource? Email info@lilith.org.

CELEBRATING

Doing It with Intention & Invention

by ELIZABETH S. BENNETT

"I didn't want to sit around and get gifts or play tacky games," said New York law student Julia Frankston-Morris. Instead, two dozen of Frankston-Morris's friends and relatives surprised her with what turned out to be a hilarious wedding-shower alternative. Guests were asked to come as some other woman, real or fictional, to impart marital advice. "My mom dressed up as Rosie the Riveter, overalls and all," Frankston-Morris recalled. "She brought me a tool kit, 'Something every woman should have,' she said." A cousin channeled Eleanor Roosevelt, adored by Frankston-Morris's late grandmother. One friend invoked Frankston-Morris's own mother, sporting mother-of-the-bride clothing. Frankston-Morris recalled the party as "a great way to get *chizuk*, or strength, from friends and family before my big day."

And for her wedding day, she wanted a women's *tisch*, modeled on the often-raucous, traditional men-only celebration for the groom, where friends and relatives gather around a table (*tisch*, in Yiddish), toasting, singing, discussing. So, on the morning of her June wedding, early-arriving guests snacked on cereal at a breakfast bar ("Breakfast is my favorite meal, said the bride). Then, along with her closest women friends and family, Frankston-Morris belted out fast-paced Jewish tunes, banged her fists on the table and threw back shots of whiskey passed around by her mother—all at 11 AM.

"I love singing," says Frankston-Morris, 24, "and I knew that I wanted to prepare for my huppah [wedding ceremony]

illustrations by FLASH ROSENBERG

after having a tisch of my own. We succeeded in getting everyone at least a little buzzed," she recollected. Not every bride wants what Frankston-Morris did, but that's precisely the point. What she created had meaning for her, and set the tone she wanted for her day-long Orthodox wedding celebration in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Single-malt Scotch aside, not all celebrations have such energy. Here's how it often goes: You volunteer to host your cousin's wedding shower, or your best friend's birthday party, or a Shabbat dinner. You're thinking about the setting, the menu, and maybe even the signature cocktail. Twisted up by logistical curlicues, you realize that you're planning a gathering with all the requisite aspects but haven't figured out how to give the celebration meaning for the specific celebrants.

Lots of us can get right into the obsessional aspects of party-planning, and there's always the risk for women of falling back into the traditional gender roles around Jewish holidays and lifecycle celebrations—the women in the kitchen (or on the décor committee), the men getting all the good lines to speak in public. But looking at celebrations anew is not just about becoming the Jewish Martha Stewart. It's giving yourself permission to go deeper—to go beyond the usual and sometimes superficial rites to mine the tradition for more. To really put your mind to exploring the significance of the event—for you.

Can meaning be orchestrated or induced? Yes, especially if we think of a celebration as an opportunity to instill joy as much as it is an exercise in planning and coordination. What we're talking about here are ways to take the measure of the celebrants and guests—and acknowledge their uniqueness. Everyone warms to being known—and to knowing. That's why asking guests to present personal wisdom or wishes to the celebrants, to come with a toast, to wear something that resonates for the honoree—doing things with *intent* is what we're talking about here.

As Jews, we're enjoined to perform all our acts of daily living with *kavanah*, intention, but holidays and milestone lifecycle events in particular deserve to be imbued with extra delight. How to do this without turning back the calendar to the days when public ritual was male turf and women the party planners? In the 15 years since Rabbi Karen Bender has led congregations in New York and California, she has seen a marked uptick in the number of congregants who want to infuse their celebrations with significant content. "but they're not sure how," says Bender, now at Reform congregation Temple Judea in Tarzana, California.

Why now? The economic downturn is not the only reason people are looking at relevant and significant ways to celebrate beyond lavish spreads and exotic settings. More likely it's that women, historically the people responsible for home-based Jewish rituals, are increasingly knowledgeable about Jewish public as well as private practice of these traditions, and therefore are increasingly comfortable with tweaking and personalizing them.

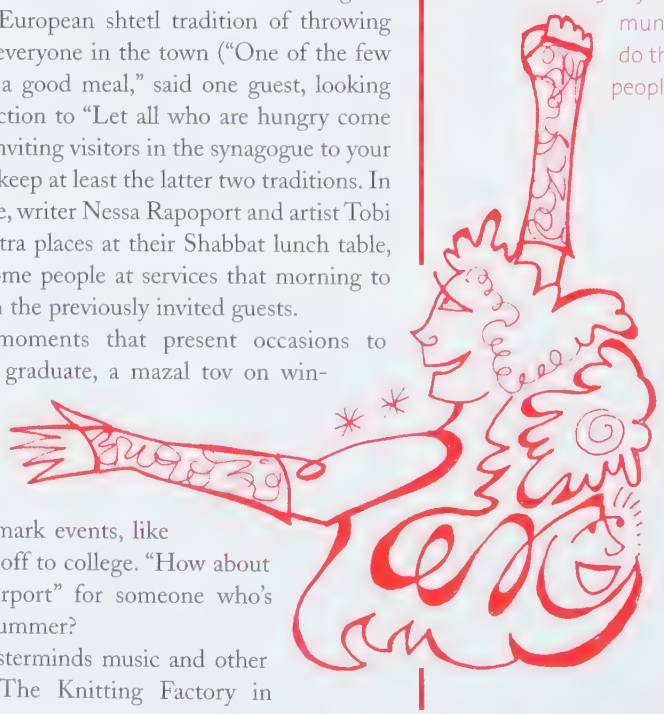
New iterations of these traditional celebrations strive for more meaning to the celebrant and more impact on the guests.

Because lavish bat and bar mitzvah parties came under attack well before the current recession, they've already been a testing ground for new ways to celebrate, emphasizing good deeds, tzedakah opportunities, and the like. For decades we've experienced "twinnings" with Jewish youth in countries where they couldn't celebrate themselves, special *tzedakah* projects, community service.

Jewish celebrations have often been occasions for reaching out to others—the Eastern European shtetl tradition of throwing open a wedding feast to everyone in the town ("One of the few times a poor person got a good meal," said one guest, looking back); the Passover injunction to "Let all who are hungry come and eat"; the mitzvah of inviting visitors in the synagogue to your Sabbath table. Many still keep at least the latter two traditions. In their New York City home, writer Nessa Rapoport and artist Tobi Kahn always set a few extra places at their Shabbat lunch table, assuming they will see some people at services that morning to join their meal along with the previously invited guests.

What about other moments that present occasions to celebrate: a toast to the graduate, a mazal tov on winning the Nobel Prize? Rabbi Susan Schnur wonders why we don't create more celebrations and ceremonies for landmark events, like "fledging" a child setting off to college. "How about Kiddush at Kennedy Airport" for someone who's headed to Israel for the summer?

Ellen Jacobs, who masterminds music and other performance events at The Knitting Factory in



To a *Very* Sweet New Year

LILY STARR

"I didn't grow up with holidays being overly important. My parents were Holocaust survivors, and the holidays were painful; most of their family was gone. My memories are of being scared of being a Jew. I don't fault my parents for this, but being Jewish was no joy or pleasure, it was a burden; we would do a Maxwell House Passover, a basic Rosh Hashanah dinner. I was determined for Judaism to be joyous for my kids, to feel good, to leave them with strong, good powerful memories, visual as well as intellectual memories.

"Every year at Rosh Hashanah I give out about 250 specially packed jars of honey to family and friends. I'd always found holiday cards formal and cold, so for a couple of years we sent small baskets with honeybears. Then, eight years ago, I started what has become a major pre-High Holidays project.

"I started looking for honey. I was driving through Pennsylvania and saw a market with buggies, the Amish country, with interesting honeys. I found unprocessed honeys, artisanal honeys. I started off using canning jars, which I sent to the beekeeper—a sweet nice guy; I feel like I'm working with a nice gentle soul, it's good karma—to fill. Then it elevated with the bottles. I start looking for bottles in late spring. Now they're from Italy, with glass stoppers. I lust after these Italian bottles. My daughter always puts in her vote for which bottle.

"I hand deliver about 200 and send about 50 by mail. We're known for it in the community. People ask, 'Are you the Starrs who do the honey?' It's a way to connect with people—family, friends, people we've had a nice

connection with over the past year, or someone who's had a hard year. It's unusual; you can't buy it." And the recipients of Starr's packages are often struck by the message that underlies the obvious care she takes: that the holiday is important, and worth the effort.

"As an adult, I studied with the Wexner Heritage Foundation, and this deepened my understanding of Jewish history and values and texts. I concluded that teaching about the holidays and Judaism can't just be intellectual. It has to be visual and auditory too. You have to make things *look* beautiful."

Every year Starr builds and decorates an elaborate sukka with materials ranging from traditional wood to PVC pipe for the frame. "We still haven't figured out how to make the best sukka," says Starr. With a different structure each year, Starr cuts and drapes fabric panels anew each year to meet the specs of the revised setup. Last year, she planned panels of green and red fleece to represent apples, and the sweetness of the New Year.

"The fleece looked terrific, and the best part was that my daughter and her friends used the material to make scarves, which were distributed to the homeless on Christmas day; the colors worked."

Starr tries to blend lessons into most of her family's celebrations. In 2007, when she read the reports about appalling conditions endured by wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., she decided to focus on Americana with the Purim baskets she was preparing to send to relatives, friends and a handful of Jewish soldiers at the Army hospital. She gathered "Uncle Sam" hats, baked hundreds of hamantashen, and instead of the traditional small bottle of wine or grape juice, opted to include vodka with red, white and blue labels.

When the hospital informed Starr that alcohol couldn't be delivered to underage soldiers, she was nonplussed. "I said, "'If they're old enough to go to Iraq and get their legs blown off, they're old enough to have a shot of vodka'." ■

Seder Homework

RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

HOWDY, SEDER ATTENDANTS 5769/2009!

Second Seder by the **Schnur-Fishdogs** will begin **promptly at 5p.m.** If you are late, you will have to wait outside until next year. Parking inside our pyramid is probably possible. Give Susan a call and she'll tell you how exactly we park our Egyptian chariots here in Goshen.

THIS YEAR'S SPIRITUAL HOMEWORK

You must to bring (in your head):

1. **Two *very* specific things you are really grateful for**, big or small, holy or mundane, of more or less obvious import. Examples: "My sister." "My coffee maker." "The Aeneid." "The way my boyfriend says 'I adore you' in Urdu." (We add these to the Hagaddah's gratitude list of *Dayenu*.)

2. One enduring question you have had for years but have never really answered to your complete satisfaction. Your lifelong question might be big or small, profound or profane: "How do airplanes work?" "What is envy?" "How do ideas spread?" "Is my nose shaped funny?" (We will add this to the Four Questions.)

You must also bring (in physical object form):

3. An object that represents something you shlep with you. Granted, we shlep a lot of things we maybe shouldn't through our 40-year desert treks, but there are also those shlepped items that are completely worthwhile, completely gratifying. What is something you've shlepped—at the expense of a sore back, a slower pace, having hands too full to carry something else (all metaphorical, of course)—that is/was worth it? Something you've held on to—even though it was hard—because it was worth it? E.g.: "Keeping kosher." "Calling my parents every day." "Being polite at work when I'm exasperated."

Spiritual homework is a mainstay of our seders. It always makes folks think about their participation in the seder ahead of time; they feel enfranchised, so they are more enthusiastic and participatory. It also lets guests learn about one another, so there's lots for them to talk about during the meal-part of the seder. The "questions" homework was particularly great, because answers were far-flung and brainy and highly amusing.

I like to take elements of the seder—like the centrality of questions (the 4 questions) that are otherwise stale after years of years of recitation—and make them alive again by coming at them from a different angle. Last year I probably did a little boosterish teaching about Judaism in relation to this homework assignment—how dialectical thinking is central to classical Jewish thinking, how we don't care about answers that much, that excellent questions are far more interesting than most answers.

I probably talked about how Rilke says the following: "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, some day far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." ■

Brooklyn (and once made a gigantic menorah from dozens of cans of He'Brew beer), is convinced that thinking through each element of an occasion–from invitations and themes to how the food is served–can set the course. "I'm always thinking, how do you make an occasion joyous? How do you stage a happy moment?'

Some of Jacobs's first memories, she said, were shaped by the emotional jolt of endorphin-filled celebrations. As a child in Talmud Torah classes in Norwich, Connecticut, Jacobs thrilled to complete each book of the Torah, a milestone always marked with a festive party, in the Jewish tradition of a *siyyum* after a portion of text study has been completed. "I couldn't wait to finish the book in order to have the party," Jacobs recalled.

In adulthood, Jacobs, 62, of Manhattan, has been an active organizer of occasions major and minor in her professional and personal life, from birthdays and congregational fundraisers to showers, baby-namings, Passover seders and her own daughter's wedding. And she says the rush she felt as a girl remains to this day. "My great moments are during a party that I've orchestrated and rolled out, when that party reaches a point where most people are reacting to the cues and they've *participated*, they've given something. That's when I get the satisfaction. They've done their best with the tools I've given them. You can't orchestrate someone's great time—some people are too guarded or just don't want to get close—but they can still get something out of it. For me it's really a transcendent experience.

"You have to set the stage for a party at the beginning. It's the people that make the party, and you sometimes have to give them a tool to step away from themselves a little bit. Props work to level people, they break down the wall people can have around them, Like being onstage, you have to close out the rest of the world at the start of a party—not for the whole party, but til it gets going."

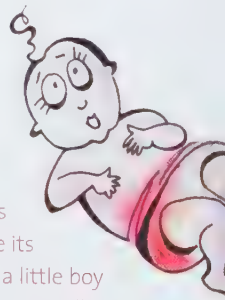
"There's an obligation when you're a guest at a party—you're there to help celebrate something. At one party, the host made the obligation explicit. For her Friday-night 50th birthday party, my friend Merle gave each entering guest a red-thread bracelet for good luck, and a handwritten note in a small envelope. The note had an individual instruction for the evening: 'I would like you to meet (for example) my friend Ellen tonight.' And that was each guest's task before the party was over."

When she begins to create any happy occasion, Jacobs' primary concern is to figure out how the guests will feel a sense of being somewhere special—and different—from the moment they enter the room. She likes to shake up the expectations, but always in a way that feels germane to the event being celebrated. "You can't let a party be generic or boring, where even the conversation seems to be about the same old thing," Jacobs says. "I like it when people are chatting about what's happening at the party." Ellen Jacobs says such investment, which doesn't have to be onerous or complicated, is integral to joyous celebrations. A sense of the dramatic helps, too; you can see the celebration "almost as a stage set." Providing monogrammed hats (with the baby's initials) at a bris, or candy cigarettes and lacy fingerless gloves at a 50th birthday (as she did recently), is, in her playbook, sometimes all that's needed. Jacobs calls such items "transformative objects. As soon as you put them on you emerge as a slightly different person," she said, adding that donning these unfamiliar items can mitigate some of the stress of mingling; they give people something to talk about.

For a bridal shower the bride-to-be, who was from another city, didn't know the guests very well, Jacobs decided she'd better seed the conversations even before the party started. Each of the 50 attendees was instructed on the invitation to bring a gift inspired by a particular holiday on the Hebrew or Gregorian calendar; Jacobs' goal was to give everyone a role in the celebrating—religious Jews, secular Jews, non-Jews. " The person who always hosts a Yom Kippur break-fast got Yom Kippur, and had

Longjohns and Big Brassieres—Unconventional Bar Mitzvah Décor

NAN KLEIN



Two of my sons had as their bar mitzvah portion *Ba-Midbar* [about the Children of Israel sojourning in the desert]. For the first, I made the room look like the desert: a tent in the room, pottery and broken pottery, all natural. For the second one I did the travels of the family from Poland to the U.S.: photos of family members, blowups of the family and their experiences, back to the great-grandparents, Ellis Island. The entire room was decorated to look like the Lower East Side. I went onto e-Bay and collected longjohns, big brassieres; I hung them on clotheslines. I filled a pushcart with antique items—pots and pans and things like that.

"For the Friday night dinner before the bar mitzvah the tables were set like old fashioned Shabbos tables. I found recreations of Depression glass saltshakers and napkin holders. How long did it take? My husband could tell you I had become obsessed. I have so many props I've used over the years....

"For three of my four boys had an *upshirin* [a ceremony and party celebrating the boy's first haircut at age three]. Whoever has a young child, it's the most amazing party! It brings such *yiddishkeit* to people attending the party. The premise of upshirin is that a fruit tree you do not cut until the fruit tree is three years old; this gives the tree its strength. For a little boy they get their yarmulke. You teach them a word or letter in the Torah and give them a piece of candy, so Torah is always studied with sweetness.

"This is my favorite party. You wake up that morning and you have a baby and when you go to bed that night you have a little boy." ■

to find a gift that had meaning for that holiday. The woman who decorates the synagogue sukkah each year got Sukkot. People who were religiously observant got 'Shabbat lunch' on their invitations. Or 'Friday night dinner.' Others got Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, New Year' Eve. People were excited about the gifts they'd brought. From the moment guests arrived at the shower, all they talked about was what holiday they had and what gifts they'd brought."

Jacobs's careful advance planning (a bridal shower she hosted for a friend's daughter gestated in her thoughts for nine months!) is one of Jacobs's inviolable rules. "You have to leave time for the ideas to generate. You can't just throw a party and not get pleasure from it! It has to feel as great as the Hebrew school party when I was 10 years old."

Jacobs's own favorite holiday traditions? "These aren't original to me, but I love doing them. For Rosh Hashanah I lead a little ceremony over a platter filled with symbolic New Years foods, like pomegranate (packed with mitzvot) and fish heads (a reminder to be a leader and a symbol of good fortune for the coming year)."

In addition to carefully assigning seats for Shabbat and holiday meals, Jacobs likes to place a card at each setting with a question related to the Torah portion that week, or the holiday at hand, or even about religion and politics. "The question could have to do with anything from what's happening in the world, to 'What does God mean to you?' to 'What would you serve Golda Meir (or Sarah Silverman) if she came to your house for lunch?' " ■

Elizabeth S. Bennett is a freelance journalist in New York City. She writes about culture, food, business and technology for print and online publications.

invitations always include highlighting an article she thinks will kick off the conversation, announcing a potluck vegetarian dinner with her personal promise that there will be enough to eat, and these lines: "Everyone is welcome to join us. Please come even if you haven't read the article, heard of Lilith, or joined us before. Feel free to bring a friend—my list is somewhat random, and therefore undoubtedly (and unintentionally) incomplete. Looking forward to seeing you soon!"

You were there

Many of us acknowledge that, matza balls aside, Passover is all about who gathers at the table. Knowing this, the Greenspuns ask their seder participants to sign and date the back page of the hagada she or he is holding. Just seeing who used that book in years past makes every guest—even first-timers—feel part of a continuum.

Walking down the aisle

In some Orthodox circles the bride and groom recite *tehillim* (psalms) to themselves as they walk down the aisle. One wedding invitation included a card asking for the name of anyone the guest would like the bride and groom to think of as they walk, similar in concept to the blessing recited for someone in need of healing.

Costume party

It's not just for Purim. We've heard of Passover seders where guests wear long robes to create sartorial simpatico with the ancient Israelites. "At first, people may feel kind of silly. But then they get into it," said Nan Klein, "acting out portions of the hagada."

Write it all down

When their daughter Felissa was about to become bat mitzvah, Raquel and Aryeh Rubin helped her create a ceremony respecting the strictures of their Orthodox congregation while staking out new ground for female participation in their South Florida community. Then, with family photos and learned commentary, plus thoughtful words from the bat mitzvah girl herself, they made a 40-page book about the experience. Toward a Meaningful Bat Mitzvah is available from targumshlishi.org

You can find innovative rituals at Lilith.org and on ritualwell.org. Please tell us about an original celebration or ceremony you've created or attended. info@Lilith.org.

But Wait! There's More!

Racing to RSVP

After Daniel Biss ran for State Representative in Illinois in 2008, "I started having Friday night dinners for friends who'd been active in the campaign. They're very informal. Each month, I invite the same couple dozen people, and each month, a different set of people show up. I make a different soup each time; my wife, Karin Steinbrueck, learns a new napkin-fold each time; and people usually seem to enjoy themselves." The trick for the guests seems to be to respond quickly enough to get a seat at the table. Here's the idea: keep the pool of invitees large and fairly constant, put an RSVP deadline in your email, and you're practically guaranteed that the guest list will shift every time.

Hanukka gelt to give, not get.

A ninth-grader explains her family's holiday philanthropy, collecting all the charitable appeals from the months before the holiday, then voting each night on how to give away money. "Eight Lessons from Hannukah, Useful All Year," by Anna Schnur-Fishman. lilith.org

Tone matters

Eve Coulson hosts a Lilith salon in Princeton, New Jersey, which meets to discuss each new issue of the magazine. Her emailed

On the 150th anniversary of his birth, his granddaughter reveals Sholom Aleichem

"The Tighter I Held On, the Better He Wrote"

by BEL KAUFMAN

No other grandfather was like mine. No other grandfather was so youthful, funny and full of impish pranks with us children. What other grandfather would conspire with us to mix up the guests' overshoes in the hall? Or show us how to walk on our hands when the tenant below complained of footsteps from our uncarpeted floor? Or teach us to speak in rhymes? Or invent a secret language—just for us—that the world, which knows him as Sholom Aleichem, the famous writer, does not share?

My cousin Tamara and I were the only grandchildren Papa Sholom Aleichem, as we called him, had in his lifetime, and he adored us. Once, when we were very little, as we were walking with him someplace in Switzerland, each holding on to his hand, he pointed to the distance. "You see that mountain?" he said. "I've just given it to Tamarochka. You see that lake? I am giving it to Belochka!"

I treasure a letter from him, written a year before he died in New York to Odessa, where I lived with my parents. "Dorogaya Belochka"—"Dear Belochka," he wrote, "I am writing you this letter to ask you to hurry and grow up, so that you can learn to write me letters. And in order to grow up, it is necessary to drink milk, eat soup and vegetables, and fewer candies. Regards to your dolls. Your Papa Sholom Aleichem." I did grow up, I did learn to write—but not in time.

It's difficult to know what is family legend and what is true memory, but one particular scene I remember vividly, although I couldn't have been more than three. Papa Sholom Aleichem and I are in a zoological garden, in front of a monkey. He takes a piece of paper, folds it into a cone, fills it with water from a nearby fountain and offers it to the monkey to drink. The monkey refuses. Papa bends down to me and says, in Russian, the language we always spoke: "Isporchenaya obezyana!" (A spoiled monkey!) He keeps refilling the paper cone with water and drinking thirstily, again and again. I learned only later that this was two years before he died, when he was plagued by an unquenchable diabetic thirst. But even about this he made a joke. He wrote to my parents: "Now I know I'll never die of hunger; I'll die of thirst."

It was more than a joke; it was the essence of his humor. Thumbing the nose at adversity, turning tables on tragedy, losing everything but winning the argument—it was laughter through tears—Jewish laughter.

Below: Bel Kaufman as a child, with Sholom Aleichem
Right: Kaufman at home, and joining the
Russian Heritage Festival in New York to celebrate
the 150th anniversary of her grandfather's birth
Photos: Joan L. Roth

Though he was loved and cherished in thousands of homes and read aloud to the sound of laughter, he suffered grave illness, excruciating pain, exile and heartbreak, yet to the end, he wrote humor for others, from his first literary efforts at the age of 14, when he compiled a "Glossary of Stepmother's Curses," in which he arranged in alphabetical order the daily curses she lavished upon him, to his last work, left unfinished by his death: "Motl the Cantor's Son in America." Of all his stories this is my favorite. When little Motl finds himself in America, he expresses his delight at its marvels. Chewing gum, he explains, is a candy made of rubber, and teachers in America are not allowed to whip their children. "Try not to love such a country!" he exclaims.

Sholom Aleichem died on May 12A (he was superstitious and never numbered his manuscripts pages 13, but 12A), 1916, in a shabby little apartment on Kelly Street in the Bronx, at the age of 57. According to the New York Times over a thousand people accompanied the funeral procession, mourning their beloved writer. He lies buried in the Workmen's Circle Cemetery in Queens, New York, for in his will he asked to be buried not among the rich and famous, but among the plain people, the workers, the ordinary folk whom he loved and who had loved their folk writer in his lifetime. Also in his will, which is considered a great ethical document, he asked to be remembered on the anniversary of his death with laughter by having family and friends gather together and read his merry stories aloud. This has been an inviolable tradition in our family, never broken to this day.

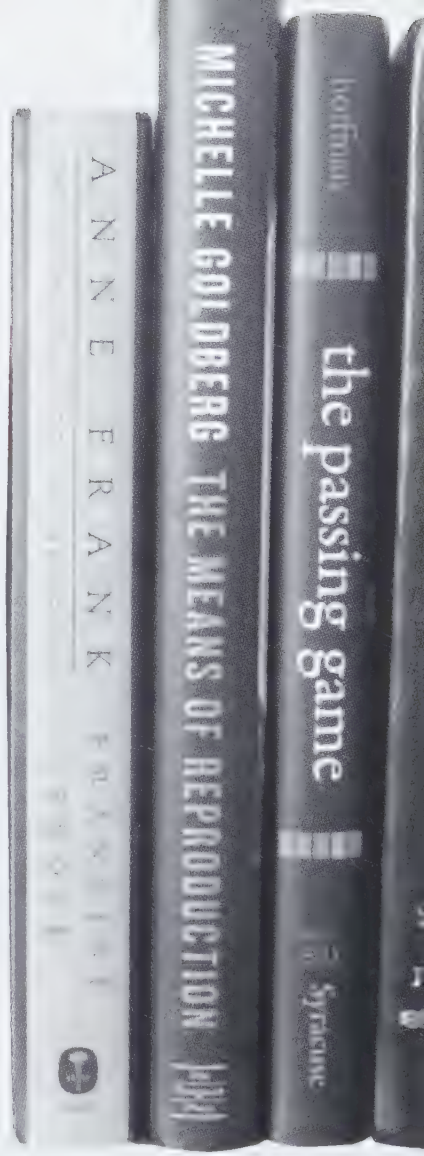
Many have seen "Fiddler on the Roof," based on Sholom Aleichem's Tevye stories, but few know that there was a real dairyman, whose name was Tevye, who delivered dairy products to my grandfather's family. Not at all like the powerful actors who have played him, he was a small, wizened man with a funny black beard that grew out of his neck, and he had no daughters. Sholom Aleichem used to enjoy talking with him, and subsequently wrote a series of stories about Tevye the Milkman and his seven daughters ("Fiddler" subtracted two). He wrote to my parents how eager he was to have his stories translated into English and his plays produced in America, adding: "My eyes won't see it; maybe yours will." Ours did.

It's awesome to realize that I am now, since Tamara's death, Sholom Aleichem's only living descendant who knew him, heard his voice, sat on his lap, and who—as he used to tell me when I was little—helped him write, by holding on tightly to his hand a we walked together. The tighter I held on, the better he wrote.

It was only after I grew up that I understood my grandfather's gift was a far more valuable one than a make-believe present of a lake in Switzerland. He left a legacy of love and laughter—love for the common people and laughter in the face of adversity. Try not to love such a grandfather! ■

Bel Kaufman is best known for her 1965 best-selling novel (later a film), Up the Down Staircase, *about an idealistic English teacher in an inner-city high school.*

REVIEWS



Still More on Anne Frank

Fifty years of controversy, adjudicated at last.

Though *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank was originally turned down by nine publishing houses in the U.S. and five in the U.K., it went on to be translated into more than 55 languages and sell more than 25 million copies. Around the globe, young people study it; audiences flock to revivals of the play based on it; and writers—and I admit to being one of these—cannot stop mining it. Now **Francine Prose**, the author of 15 novels and five books of nonfiction, takes up the challenge with ***Anne Frank: The Book, The Life, The Afterlife*** (Harper Collins, $24.99).

As the subtitle makes clear, Prose has undertaken an explication of the text, a retelling of the events chronicled in the diary, and an account of the bizarre life Anne Frank's diary took on after her death.

The first part sets out to show that the work is not merely the day-to-day musings of an adolescent girl, but a dazzling work of art, carefully crafted by a gifted and extremely serious young writer. Like the able teacher she is, Prose plumbs *The Critical Edition*, which is a comparison of the various drafts of the diary edited by Anne before her death and by her father after, as well as handwriting analyses, to demonstrate Anne's eye for detail, ear for dialogue, skill at character building, and sure sense of pacing and voice.

Prose's account of life in the Secret Annex is brief but authoritative. She separates the characters Anne renamed and brilliantly brought to life from the actual individuals in hiding, whom we know from contemporary accounts and memoirs. Peter's parents were not the vulgar feuding couple we meet in the diary. The dentist was not the buffoon she loathed. Rather than undermine the validity of Anne's account, the differences reveal the subtlety and skill of the young writer, who used her own perceptions to heighten the power of the tale. But the most dramatic section of Prose's study concerns the strange and often heartbreaking life the diary took on long after the young girl who perished in Bergen Belsen wrote "I want to go on living even after my death!"

The diary, and the play and movie based on it, incited passions. Feuds broke out, careers foundered, marriages fell apart, charges flew, and lawsuits dragged on interminably. Prose demonstrates how the play and the movie turned a precociously intelligent, talented, and morally evolving young woman into a mindless American teenybopper. "On the page she is brilliant; on the stage she's a nitwit." She is generous to all the players involved, occasionally too much so, as when she ignores Otto Frank's letters urging the stonewalling of the dentist's widow who protests his portrayal as a fool, as well as Meyer Levin's reckless Red-baiting of just about everyone involved in the production of the play. But for the most part, Prose is admirably evenhanded.

Nothing here is new, but Prose never pretends it is. She has read exhaustively in the Anne Frank literature, thought deeply about the diary and its place in our world, and written a book that is at once passionate about the diary and dispassionate about the controversies that have surrounded it for more than half a century. In the cacophony of Anne Frank partisans and deniers, those who want to canonize her and those who want to use her as a cudgel to hammer home their own views, Prose sounds a note of sanity.

ELLEN FELDMAN

Reclaiming the Means of Reproduction

A call to action in the war against women's rights.

Michelle Goldberg's captivating book, ***The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power, and the Future of the World*** (Penguin Press, $25.95) is perfectly timed to remind those who came of age post-Roe v. Wade and might think they can relax under an Obama administration, just how much work is left to do. An investigative journalist and author previously of *Kingdom Coming: the Rise of Christian Nationalism*, Goldberg has imbued this long-running story with fresh power by telling it in her young feminist voice.

The Means of Reproduction is a sweeping history of U.S. foreign policy on international family planning that spans four continents and covers issues such as birth control, abortion, HIV/AIDS, their intersections with environmental concerns and economic development, and the gender politics of it all, while staying in intimate touch with how America's policies affect real women globally.

The story begins during the 1960s' cold war, when Republicans like John D. Rockefeller and, yes, George H.W. "Rubbers" Bush led the charge to secure U.S. funding for international family planning, convinced that population pressures threatened national security. Then as now, family planning proponents met predictable adversaries. Goldberg writes, "There is one thing that unites cultural conservatives throughout the world, a critique that joins Protestant fundamentalism, Islamists, Hindu Nationalists, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and ultramontane Catholics. All view women's equality and self-possession as unnatural, a violation of the established order. Yet in one society after another, we can see the absence of women's rights creating existential dangers."

Goldberg glosses over the central role played by Family Planning International Assistance (as Planned Parenthood Federation of America's international division was then known) in scaling family planning services overseas, and their lonely, ultimately unsuccessful, battle against the Global Gag Rule which, off and on since Ronald Reagan's presidency, has proscribed U.S. funding of birth control services to organizations that provide or even discuss abortion. (President Obama removed the Gag Rule by executive order but underlying legislation remains.)

More important, *The Means of Reproduction* argues persuasively in today's vernacular how the absence of women's human right to reproductive self-determination contributes to overpopulation, environmental disaster, unhealthy families, HIV/AIDS, and sex-ratio imbalances that threaten global stability.

During my 30 years in the leadership of Planned Parenthood, I met many of the characters Goldberg depicts, with all their strengths and faults. And having joined the movement soon after the infamous Helms amendment banned U. S. foreign assistance for abortion or abortion-related services, I hope her recounting of the political damage and human carnage Sen. Helms' law has wreaked will ignite a ringing call to rescind it.

Reproductive rights aren't everything women need, but without them, women can't determine anything else in their lives. After eight years of the George W. Bush administration's all-out war on women's rights, Goldberg awakens a new generation to the imperative of undoing the damage and moving forward vigorously once again.

GLORIA FELDT

All Jews Are Queer

Jewish American culture is about as queer as it gets.

The Passing Game: Queering Jewish American Culture by **Warren Hoffman** (Syracuse University Press, $24.95) challenges the popular conception of what "queer" is, reaching back to reexamine some of the hallmarks of American Jewish culture in the 20th century. Focusing on six major works (with more modern pieces bookending the discussion), Hoffman upholds a definition of queer that has gained increasing currency in recent years—one that denotes non-heteronormative sexual or gender identity—but he reclaims the term's original or alternative definitions as well: queer is something odd, something different. And it's not only sexual orientation or gender identity that can be queered; everything from racial identity and immigrant status is open to queer interpretation. Queer, Hoffman demonstrates, is about passing, not passing, and subverting the paradigm, and he delights in demonstrating how, by this definition, Jewish American culture (represented in this book by literature, film and theater) is about as queer as it gets.

Moving through great works of the Jewish American canon—such as Sholem Asch's "God of Vengance," Phillip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, and all of the important films by Yiddish stage and screen legend Molly Picon—Hoffman seeks to demonstrate that the Jew has long been "other" in America—odd, different and, one might say, queer. The struggle to assimilate, and the undercurrents of counter-assimilationist culture, have really been ways for Jewish Americans to grapple with their queerness—their distinct otherness, which made them unique but also was often feared, lest it inhibit their ability to become American. Hoffman puts it plainly when discussing Abraham Cahan's 1917 novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*: "In the world of the assimilating Jewish American immigrant, one cannot be queer and American at the same time."

Of course, there's plenty of modern-day queerness in the book, as well, in examinations of Picon's onstage cross-dressing and the fine line between homosocial and homosexual in David Levinsky's tortuous love life—not to mention the lesbian love affair in "God of Vengence" and Portnoy's obsession with his own male member. But the real joy in a work like this is its ability to challenge what our concept of "queer" really is. Although this book does refer to a lot of queer theory and tends towards the dense and erudite, it is a great read for anyone examining Jewish work on page, stage or screen in America—or anyone who ever wondered, deep down, if there wasn't something just a bit…queer about Jewish culture in America.

The Jew has long been "other" in America—odd, different and, one might say, queer.

MELANIE WEISS

Saving Teen Souls

Former runaway finds her double, 20 years later.

"All the volunteers here have a shtick," confides **Janice Erlbaum** in the beginning of ***Have You Found Her*** (Villard, $14). This memoir *(continued on page 40)*

LOVE AND LOCATION

"They were chased out of paradise"

Paula Jacques's novel, ***Light of My Eye***, translated by Susan Cohen-Nicole (Holmes & Meier, $24.00) is a stunning evocation of 1950s Jewish-Arab Cairo told through the eyes of a young girl.

Published in France in 1980 as *Lumiere de l'Oeil*, *Light of My Eye* is the first of Jacques's eight novels to appear in English.

This book spotlights two crucial moments in Egyptian (and Jewish) history: the 1952 revolution that led to the abdication of the decadent King Farouk, reviled as a British puppet; and the 1956 Suez crisis, when Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and Israel, France, and England declared war against Egypt. Each time, Jews, along with the British and other "foreigners," were targets of Arab nationalist rage—their synagogues and shops pillaged and burned by rioting mobs, their property seized and their citizenship revoked.

Mona Castro is the child of a prosperous Jewish Egyptian family struggling to respond to the "gong of misfortune" promising "death to the Jews." Her family fears the worst, but postpones exile as long as possible. Mona's father asks, "You want me to burn down my own house and wander around the world?" As a counterpoint, Mona's communist cousin Bolissa brands the family as "pecuniary abusers" and advocates "union with the people." The ideal, she tells Mona, is "in the morning when you get up, you don't rejoice merely because you have nice furniture."

The author, herself born in Cairo to a Sephardic family that fled Egypt in 1958, gives us sensory detail available only to someone who knows a place intimately: Cairo's air is "scented with jasmine, dung, and gasoline," its streets filled "with the cries of vendors at their tiny stands of melon seeds, figs, green soup, watermelons, sweet noodles, chick-peas, cigarettes, and individual razor blades." Mona is a precocious, rebellious, imaginative child—"a collector of scars, falls, and faintings." Affectionately termed "little bull" by her Arab governess, she is the only girl in her family, contesting the privileges of her two brothers, drawn to her charismatic father, in conflict with her sensuous mother, and appalled by an aunt's negative reaction to the birth of a daughter. Her retrospective story is interspersed with occasional monologues spoken in the present by her now elderly mother. "All you have to write is a single sentence: they were chased out of paradise—and you've said it all," the mother declares, and asks, "When are you finally going to get married?"

Jacques skillfully portrays young Mona's relationship with an old man—a lonely, wounded, Ashkenazi Holocaust survivor who cultivates a lovingly erotic, imaginative liaison with the sensitive, lonely girl. Is Mona the man's victim? Or does her experience with him enrich her? Should he be condemned? Why then does he evoke her protective tenderness? When boundary lines are drawn they violating the full truth of relationship: Ashkenazi and Sephardi, male and female, old and young, rich and poor, Jew and Muslim, European and Arab—we find all here in Jacques's brilliant recreation of a world destroyed precisely by the interposition of hard boundaries between self and other.

JOYCE ZONANA

In ***Appassionata*** (Other Press, $25), **Eva Hoffman** tells the story of a short but searing love affair in the life of concert pianist Isabel Merton, an impassioned performer with little passion for real life. Adrift in space, she tours the concert halls of Europe, spending at most a few days in each city. She is also adrift in time, as her attention wanders from her present career to her past studies with the influential, ascetic mentor of her youth. She longs for a tie that will ground her, but settles for meaningless conversation with strangers on airplanes, acquaintances at receptions, and a few old friends along the way.

In the midst of this "longing and loneliness" arrives Anzor Islikhanov, a Chechen expatriate devoted to the cause of his country. As itinerant and alone as she is, he begs for an introduction after he hears her perform in Paris and then follows her to her next performance in Sofia. Two cities later, in Brussels, they consummate their relationship.

As Anzor's path increasingly overlaps with Isabel's in the concert halls, political receptions, and hotel rooms of Europe's great cities, he reveals himself as no cool-headed diplomat, but a mentally unhinged exile with uncontrollable hatred for the Russians and a singular desire to exact revenge for his people's oppression at any cost. Isabel is "porous," Hoffman explains, with "St. Teresa tendencies…It is how she experiences the world, how she lets music enter." It is for this reason that she continues her love affair with an enraged man who talks only of war, lashes out at the small talk of others, and constantly rebukes Isabel for being unable to understand his life's pain. She tries to pull his behavior back within accepted norms, but he's already too far gone. "So being angry is not nice, is that the idea?" he taunts her. "If you lose your rage, you lose…your self-respect." Anzor takes up with Isabel for the pleasure he derives imagining what the Western Europeans who despise his people would think if they knew how intimate he was with the beautiful, serene pianist. Indeed, Anzor may be the centerpiece of Isabel's existence for the months of their relationship, but *his* attention never shifts

from Chechnya. When he is forced to choose, his decision has a dire impact on how Isabel makes music.

Formerly detached from real life and immersed entirely in music, now paralyzed by her inability to deal with the consequences of her personal choices, Isabel must summon a strength that she and her closest confidantes doubt she has if she is ever to return to performing. Hovering over her healing process is the ultimate question of whether someone as impressionable as she can ever safely encounter anyone without disturbing her art. Hoffman, author of the poignant memoirs *Shtetl* and *Lost in Translation*, meditates on what kind of personality is required to produce art, and what responsibility an individual has to engage politically in the world.

TAMMY HEPPS

Aysha Silvermintz, the heroine of **Rachel DeWoskin**'s debut novel ***Repeat After Me*** (Overlook, $23.95), is just barely hanging on. Abandoned by her father in the wake of her parents' messy divorce, she suffered a nervous breakdown in college and now, at 22, is only tentatively putting the fragile pieces of her life into some semblance of order again. She teaches English to foreign students in New York City, where communicating the rhythm and cadence of her mother tongue to those who are strangers enables her to feel a little less like a stranger herself. But when she meets Da Ge, an angry yet oddly appealing young Chinese student who walks into her classroom, Aysha finds herself drawn to his confusion and his sorrow, twin mirrors, it seems, for her own. Thus begins their improbable story, one that includes a hasty marriage of convenience suggested by Da Ge, in pursuit of his green card.

What begins as convenience, though, quickly turns to lust and ultimately to love:

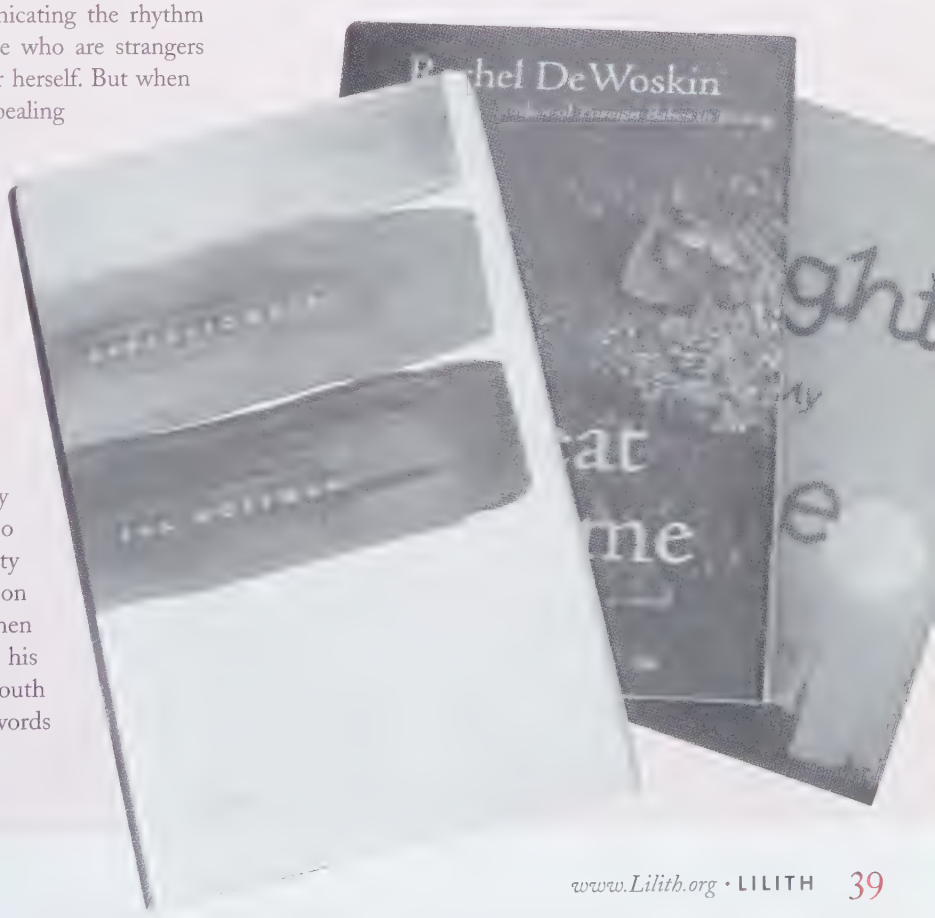
> I could feel the muscles in Da Ge's back, the pulse in his neck where I pressed my open mouth. He smelled like shampoo and newsprint. He had brought the city inside my apartment with him; the skin on his face was still cool from the night. When his hips were moving against mine, and his breathing jagged and rough, he put his mouth over my ear. His voice was like heat, his words so clear I can still hear their edges. 'I want you unbelievable bad,' he said.

DeWoskin, who spent several years living and working in China and who is the author of the acclaimed memoir *Foreign Babes in Beijing*, renders this doomed romance with dexterity and grace. She directs the story back and forth between Beijing and New York, past and present; the two separate strands draw closer and closer together, until they are interwoven into one seamless whole.

In the end, Aysha's longing for Da Ge cannot save him from the past that haunts him, a past in which the personal and political collide in a cruel and, finally, catastrophic way. Her attempt, though, to bridge the gap that divides them with the tender force of her love breathes fresh and palpable life into this highly original and impressive fictional debut. Read it and weep.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH

For more on how DeWoskin came to write about China, read Yona Zeldis McDonough's interview with the author at Lilith.org.



(continued from page 37)
traces two years of Erlbaum's journey as a volunteer at the same homeless shelter where she had lived briefly as a teenage runaway 20 years earlier, an experience chronicled in her memoir *Girlbomb*. Erlbaum's shtick—the activity that gives her an excuse to connect with the girls who live at the shelter—is jewelry. Every Wednesday she shows up in the shelter's cafeteria with a large bag of bead-working supplies to shouts of "Yo, Bead Lady!"

Now a successful writer with a loving boyfriend, gorgeous apartment, and the sole vice of a perpetual joint in her ashtray, even Erlbaum isn't sure exactly what made her come back to this place: "And every week, there was the unspoken question, the one I didn't know enough to ask myself: Have you found her yet? The one who reminds you of you?"

Although strongly discouraged by the shelter's staff from choosing favorites, Erlbaum can't help but love a series of mainly "black and brown" teens, whose chaotic lives of gangbanging, hustling and using guarantees sudden exits and heartbreak. Then she meets Samantha Dunleavy, a white, spunky, resilient 19-year-old junkie savant, fighting to stay sober and transform her life. Despite seven years on the streets, Sam is a gifted writer and classical pianist, and reads everything from astrophysics to Nietzsche.

Erlbaum falls hard for Sam, and over the course of a year develops an unusually tight relationship that encompasses the roles of best friend, writing mentor, and big sister; she even offers to be Sam's legal guardian. During a series of health crises that afflict Sam—a raging wrist infection, drug relapse, flashbacks of abuse that induce suicidal thought, fungemia that nearly blinds her—Erlbaum follows her charge through detoxes and psych wards, halfway houses and hospitals, desperately wanting Sam to know she is going to be okay, to know she's cared for, even while Erlbaum increasingly resents how much time Sam is taking.

Her memoir begins to read like a true-crime story the minute Erlbaum suspects the runaway Sam is not whom she claims to be.

In the second half, *Have You Found Her* begins to read like a true crime story, the minute the author starts to suspect that Sam is not who she claims to be. Erlbaum turns detective, using her own meticulous journal entries, the Internet, and skillful interview techniques to learn Sam's true identity, and the cause of her illnesses. Along the way, readers get to see Erlbaum mature, as she faces her own issues head on: her strong desire to be needed, her enabling tendencies, even her soft drug use.

Erlbaum's book stands out for its unapologetic humor and honesty. Her characters and true-to-life dialogue make this memoir read like a novel. (In fact on the author's website http://girlbomb.typepad.com, readers can watch her performing the characters). And though many questions are left unanswered, we do know that the author has come to some peace by the book's epilogue: "I'm not looking for Little Janice anymore. She's here inside me, where she's always been. And she's happy."

YAEL FLUSBERG

Vigorous and Vivacious

A chance to meet the woman who revitalized Bible study.

Nehama Leibowitz (1905–1997)—known, despite her renown and academic distinctions, simply as Nehama—was still actively teaching Torah for a number of years after I arrived in Jerusalem, yet I never met or studied with her. For those with similar regrets, and for those who did know and learn from the woman who taught generations of Jewish educators how to study the Bible, the beautifully produced new book by **Yael Unterman**, *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar* (Urim, $33) is a celebration. Nehama Leibowitz's feisty personality, and the staunch principles and methods that guided her, emerge vividly from the pages, largely in the words of those who knew her best.

"What's troubling Rashi?" Nehama would demand of her students. To be identified with a question rather than an answer was emblematic of her long career, which lasted from her arrival in Jerusalem in 1930, newly married (to her much older uncle, Yedidyah Lipman Leibowitz) and with a fresh Ph.D., right up to her death in 1997. Though she quickly gained prominence as a teacher, her early fame arose from her legendary *gilyonot*, worksheets on the weekly Torah readings. Not only did she mail these stenciled sheets, free of charge, to anyone who requested them; she also personally corrected the responses and mailed them back to hundreds of eager students from all walks of life (she harbored a particularly tender spot for soldiers who wrote to her from their outposts). Convinced that intellectual challenge leads to lifelong engagement with the text, only much later in life was she persuaded to publish some answers. Her *Studies*, in which she probed the responses of Bible commentators, ancient and modern, to issues posed by the Torah text, were soon translated into English and other languages, and these, along with her many students from abroad, spread her fame to the Diaspora—despite her refusal ever to leave Israel.

Unterman's book is not a conventional biography, and although the first part is devoted to Nehama's life, very little is said of its events. As a feminist reader, I felt somewhat shortchanged. For example, we are not told of how Nehama's experience of higher education compared with that

of her Jewish female contemporaries. And her mother is killed off on the second page ("she died relatively early on")—though it later appears that she was still alive at the time of Nehama's marriage and *aliyah*.

Instead, Unterman devotes each chapter to a facet of Nehama's personality, ideology, scholarship and educational methods, which she analyzes using direct quotes from interviews with former students, plus learned references to Nehama's writings and works written about her. This gives rise to much overlap and repetition, and to a somewhat hagiographic view of Nehama's life, emphasizing its latter years. Nevertheless, readers who plow through the book's 600 pages will be rewarded with nuggets like Unterman's discussion of whether or not Nehama was a feminist (Nehama herself maintained that she wasn't, but her influence upon Jewish feminists has been inestimable), and her chapter on Nehama's relationship with her brilliant, iconoclastic brother, the scientist and religious philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz. In an erudite study of Nehama's scholarly approach and the scholars who influenced her, Unterman finally shows what she can do when she breaks away from the interviews. Her Nehama is vigorous and vivacious, and, as Unterman concludes, maintains her influence upon how most of us study Torah.

DEBORAH GRENIMAN

Trying Not to Be Young

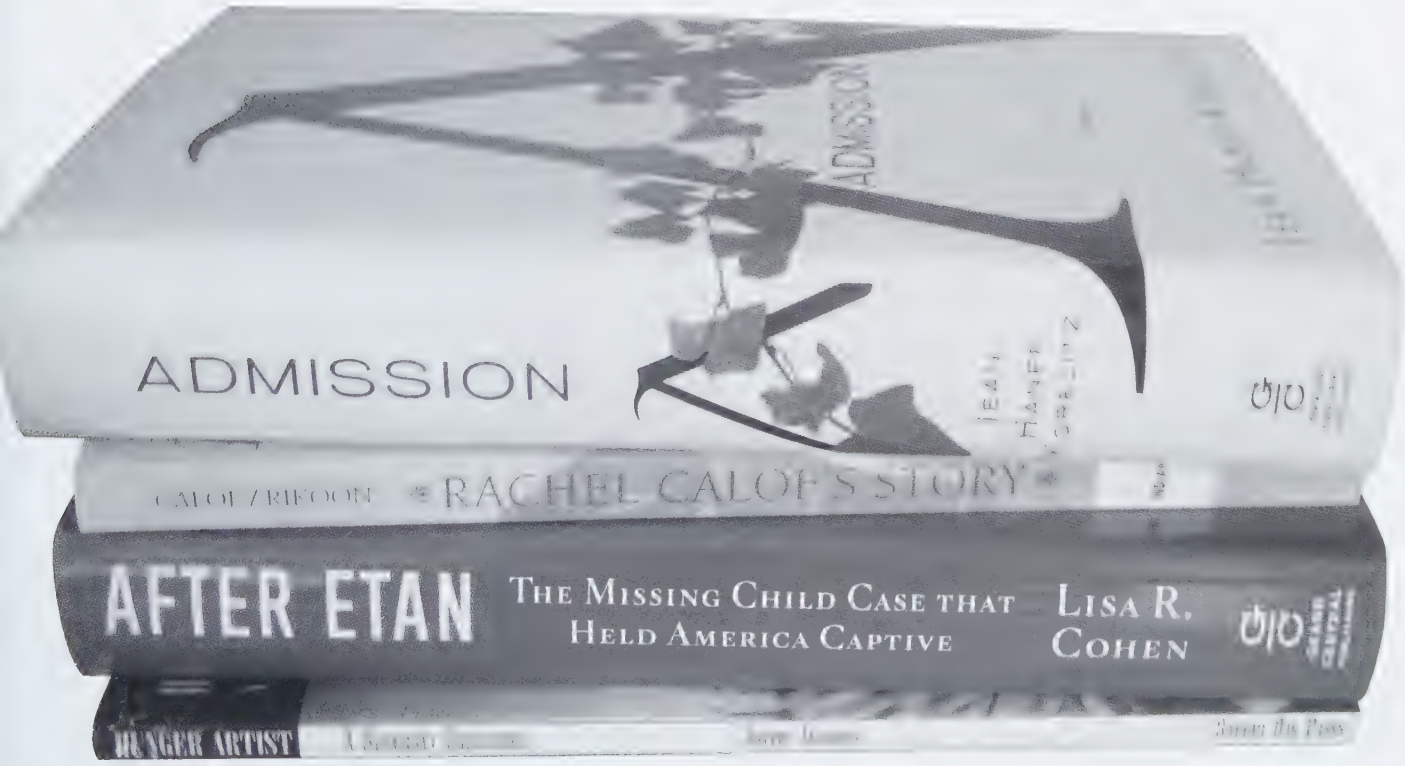
Behind the curtain at the college admissions office.

Admission, by **Jean Hanff Korelitz** (Grand Central Publishing, $24.99), takes its reader down the yellow brick road of the Ivy League—specifically to the venerable institution of Princeton University. If Princeton, however, is the Emerald City, this novel focuses on the men (and women) behind the curtain: the admissions officers with the power to wave their wands and admit an incoming class of freshmen to a world of privilege and status.

When the book begins, one of these admissions officers, Portia Nathan, has finally gotten the plum assignment of the New England territory, encompassing prestigious boarding schools and shady public schools alike. While doing her "road show" one travel season, she goes to an independent, innovative school and meets two people who will change her life. One is a teacher who knew her (and loved her from afar) during her undergraduate days at Dartmouth; the other is a wild-card student genius whose application to Princeton tests her in unexpected ways. Portia's love affair with the teacher and her relationship with the student weave inextricably into one another.

Korelitz's husband, poet Paul Muldoon, is a Princeton professor, and Korelitz herself was once a part-timer in Princeton's admissions office, experiences lending a potent realism to her writing:

> Few of them sounded like kids, they were trying so hard not to be young. They were ventriloquizing the attorneys they thought they wanted to



be, or the neuroscientists, or the statesmen.... But so often the newness of them, the flux of their emerging selves, would poke through the essays or the recommendations, stray references to how Jimmy had grown since his difficult freshman year or Jimmy's own regrettable use of the word *awesome*. Their confidence was sometimes so hollow, it practically echoed off the page.

Korelitz's depictions of dorm life almost make the reader's clothes smell of stale beer. In one scene, the door is "flung open to display the universal décor of the newly emancipated Princeton male: alcoholia (on a shelf, the empty bottles of beer of many nations, all in a row), technology (an oversize television screen and snarls of wires), and Princetoniana (tigers, tigers everywhere...)."

Portia Nathan is Jewish, though only as an afterthought. If anything, this point is the book's weakest link: her Judaism is solely defined by her non-Jewish college boyfriend, for whom her appeal lies almost completely in the fact that he "has this thing for Jewish girls." However, the backstory of the non-Jewish boyfriend is crucial to the story taking place in the here-and-now. Ultimately this book is a tale of admissions, literally and metaphorically. It is the story of the choices we make, and how, at the end of the day, they define who we are.

JORDANA HORN

Hungering for Meaning

Growing up Jewish and female in the '50s and '60s.

Through language that is rich, sensual, and almost hypnotic, **Joanne Jacobson** recounts her experiences growing up in the suburbs of Chicago in ***Hunger Artist: A Suburban Childhood*** (Bottom Dog Press, $16). This remarkable memoir captures the sense of possibility that characterized Jewish suburbia in the years after WWII, as well as the tensions surrounding gender and ethnicity that simmered underneath the idyllic surface.

Jacobson is not only a talented memoirist but also a professor of English and a scholar of the Jewish-American experience. With an academic's eye for historical context, she weaves the crucial events of the postwar years into the narrative without ever sacrificing her poetic tone or the realism of her childlike perspective.

Stockpiling toilet paper and cans of tuna fish, filched one by one from kitchen cabinets, she buries her provisions in an empty lot across the street.

We see her react to the fear of nuclear war by "stockpiling toilet paper and cans of tuna fish, filched one by one from kitchen cabinets," and burying her provisions in an empty lot across the street. When the news that President Kennedy had been shot rips through their suburban town in the middle of a school day, she recalls that their mothers tried to keep them safely at home for just a little bit longer during their lunch hour, "reluctant to release their children into the suddenly changed world." In the wake of the Holcoaust, she writes of the Sunday school teachers who "inform us that we are the future of the Jewish people... that America and Israel are miracles in our time, that modern Hebrew is the language of redemption, and the suburban prosperity that we take so gracelessly for granted—dumping half-full containers of chocolate milk into the garbage in the middle of class!—is a gift of life that they could never have dreamed during their own childhoods in Poland."

Many of the finest, most poignant sections of this memoir evoke the particular pressures of being Jewish and female in 1950s suburbia. Jacobson recalls one particularly painful episode in which her mother must reluctantly drive her out of the suburbs toward Chicago's Devon Avenue, "where the shops owned by elderly Jewish Eastern European immigrants cater to 'special' sizes," in order to find her a dress for her cousin's upcoming wedding. Her bulky childhood body, redolent of old-world, Jewish ideals of solidity and a far cry from the small, girdled waists that were the feminine ideal in postwar America, literally did not fit into the clothing available in chic, suburban shops. "This is my punishment for giving in to hunger: exile from the land of proud bodies, bodies that lilt through space in bright, form-fitting cloth," she writes. And yet, in spite of the shame she feels at her inability to quell her appetite, there is an element of proud resistance in Jacobson's childhood desire for mandelbrot, cheesecake and brownies. Her prepubescent girth becomes the literal embodiment of her refusal to ignore her particular hungers as a girl and a Jew, given poignant voice in this tender and sympathetic memoir.

RACHEL KRANSON

Etan Patz is Dead

The gruesome disappearance which spawned the "missing children" movement.

I grew up in New York City in the aftermath of an event that changed the way people parented in New York—the disappearance of Etan Patz, missing since 1979, when he left his mother's sight for a few minutes walking to his school bus. The details of this story are described relentlessly in **Lisa Cohen**'s new book ***After Etan: The Missing Child Case that Held America Captive*** (Grand Central Publishing, $25.99). It turns out that the words "Etan Patz" are code. "To many Americans, and to an entire generation of New Yorkers," Cohen writes, "the two words are synonymous with suddenly, mysteriously, losing a child forever." I had never known the terrifying details. Now, after having read the book, I'm not sure I'm glad that I do.

The book reads like a combination of a detective story and a police report. It begins on a cloudy May morning, and ends, chillingly, with the hovering date of 2014, when Jose Ramos is expected to be released from prison. We think, but are not certain, that he is the man who abducted, sodomized, murdered and destroyed the body of the blond boy who had just learned to pour chocolate milk for himself, and who would become the first missing child whose photo would appear on milk cartons nationwide.

Cohen, a journalist, re-creates for the reader a tiny fraction of the agony the Patz family has been living with for almost 30 years. She makes a compelling case against Ramos, but then reveals, horrifyingly, that the proof of his guilt is not substantial enough to keep him in jail (he is serving a sentence now for the abduction of another boy, who testified against him). But the gruesome facts could have been summarized in a page, and this intimate sharing of years of agonized searching for the sake of a story feels like voyeurism.

The most valuable parts of the book—a few pages in the beginning and the end—describe Julie Patz, Etan's mother. A convert to Judaism who left her family and her background to marry her husband and raise a family in New York City, she responded to this tragedy with action. She and her husband managed to raise their two other children, Shira and Ari, and were responsible for helping to create a movement for missing and exploited children, and numerous child-protection laws. She became a school librarian, and then principal, and nurtured generations of children, showering them with kindness, love, and attention.

She even helped to teach their parents how to give them the independence she believed was healthy and necessary for children. She worked at a middle school that allowed its students to leave the building for lunch. "Every year," writes Cohen, "a few parents balked at giving the necessary permission... Julie would intervene... to plead a student's case." Despite what had happened to her son, she poignantly instructed her students' parents: "they have to grow and gain confidence in themselves... you can't lock them in the house or in class."

I don't know if Julie Patz would recommend this book. I would, instead, recommend her example: a dedication to the vulnerable and the innocent, and a life of action, imbued with grace, courage, and compassion.

MAYA BERNSTEIN

Discovering a Hair-Raising Pioneer Memoir

In the 1890s, a Jewish "Little House on the Prairie"

I came upon Laura Ingalls Wilder's prairie stories as an adult, while reading them to my son. I was as captivated by **Rachel Calof**'s autobiography ***Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*** (Indiana University, $13.95), which I read in one sitting, mesmerized by a Jewish pioneer spirit as strong and as compelling as that of her Christian counterpart.

Rachel Calof wrote her memoirs for her children when she was 60, in Yiddish. A translation of her writing was discovered by a post-doctoral fellow in the Hebrew Union College archives, who realized the value of publishing her work.

Rachel Bella Kahn lost her mother when she was four, and she and her siblings suffered violent maltreatment from a servant, stepmother, and their father. They were distributed amongst relatives and orphanages when their father decided to emigrate to the New World, and they never heard from him again. Rachel became a servant for a rich relative, and her family refused to grant her freedom to marry her sweetheart, the butcher's son, because such a match would bring shame upon them.

By 18 she was an old spinster, and agreed to cooperate when an acquaintance suggested she might marry her relative in America. After passing several tests and exchanging photographs, Rachel received money from her intended, Abraham Calof, for the passage to New York. She describes the hair-raising complexities of the journey from a small Ukrainian town to Hamburg and the ordeal of getting onto the ship (her ticket and passport had different names on them).

Abraham may have been the first piece of luck in Rachel's life. After paying for her trip, he told her she shouldn't feel beholden to him, and he would not insist that they marry. She trusted him, and agreed to make the trip to North Dakota with him in 1894, the same year Laura Ingalls Wilder abandoned that drought-ridden area for Missouri.

Rachel discovered that Abraham was joining his family in their homesteading venture. Initially, and every winter for the first few years of their marriage, the lack of privacy was the most appalling privation of pioneer life, Rachel says. Seven people shared a 12 by 14 foot home with chickens (whose coops were under the beds) and a calf. "The chickens were generous with their perfumes and we withstood this, but the stench of the calf tethered in the corner was well-nigh intolerable."

Some of Rachel's stories of the prairie are strikingly familiar. The U.S. government gave away "free land" to those who could tolerate five years of hell on it, including 40-degree-below-zero winters without enough fuel or food, and hail-storms, cyclones, and drought. But the

In the 1890s, North Dakota's 40-below winters, with chickens and calves crowding the one-room cabin, no regular food, no birth control, despair gave birth to courage.

Jewish elements are very fresh. The Calofs were not consistently observant—accordingly to Rachel, her spouse worked on the Sabbath, for example. But they did circumcise their sons and ritually slaughter their animals, both of which involved expense and significant effort. Rachel also mentions that after the family succeeded on their farm, they made large celebrations of Jewish holidays, and Jews came from far away to be with them.

Rachel's sufferings in the Ukraine and North Dakota are difficult to imagine. She had no toilets, no running water, no regular food supply, and no birth control. She bore and raised nine children through many accidents and serious illness, helped only by a mother-in-law who frightened her with tales of the devil taking newborn babies. But her energy, her gumption, her extreme will to survive are familiar to anyone who has lived through challenges, and who at some point says "I cannot go on." Rachel says, "In just two brutal days the pioneer life had brought me to the brink of desperation. Yet, as always, a spark of resistance to my lot and a core of determination remained within me…Despair gave birth to courage."

This beautifully written testament is a reminder that we have much to bless, every day, for a world with washing machines and sewage systems and separate rooms to put mothers-in-law.

C. DEVORA (VIVA) HAMMER

Women! Yiddish!

The Emily Post of the 17th Century.

First published posthumously in 1609, ***Meneket Rivkah*** (Jewish Publication Society, $55), by **Rivkah Tiktiner** is considered the oldest Yiddish-language book written by a woman. Add to this the fact that the book was believed lost since the late 19th century and was not rediscovered until roughly a century later, and the text takes on a life of its own. The long-lost moral-homiletic book comes back to life in a reissued English translation with annotations by historian Frauke von Rohden, intended to make Tiktiner's words more accessible to a wider audience.

The book's title, Hebrew for "Rebecca's nursemaid," is a Biblical allusion to the death of Rebecca's nursemaid, Deborah. The work belongs to the canon of *musar* (ethical) literature, written in Yiddish and popular among women and uneducated men in the 16th and 17th centuries. The main thrust of *Meneket Rivkah* is Tiktiner's laundry list of how a married Jewish woman is to conduct herself in the domestic and social spheres. Each of its seven chapters tackles a different aspect of a woman's conduct; the most space is devoted to childrearing and education. Ironically, although Tiktiner was herself clearly a role model for Jewish women's education in her day and age, she does not explicitly advocate that girls should know Hebrew, nor does she outline any specific educational program for girls.

The publication of *Meneket Rivkah* was no small feat in its day—especially since many Jewish women could neither read nor write, let alone entertain the thought of composing a full-scale book. Indeed, the book's printer was so impressed that he indicated as much on the cover page: "Who has ever heard or seen such a novelty?" Until Tiktiner, Jewish exegetical texts had all been composed solely by men. With her work came the rendering of new interpretations of the Torah's written law and oral tradition that sometimes broaden rabbinic interpretations and offer an explicitly female perspective. For instance, the traditional rabbinical interpretation views menstruation and the pains of childbirth and labor as punishments for Eve's sin of having eaten from the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Tiktiner distances herself from such a misogynistic approach. Instead, she attributes these physiological functions to "women's natural character, since animals, too, are capable of pregnancy and birth." *Meneket Rivkah* is a literary timepiece that provides a deeper perspective on the position of Jewish women in the early modern period, as well as the unusual insights and uncommon erudition of one such woman.

RIVKA CHAYA SCHILLER

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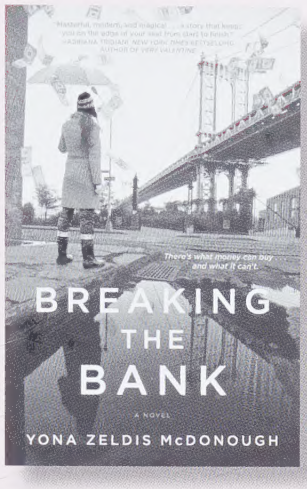
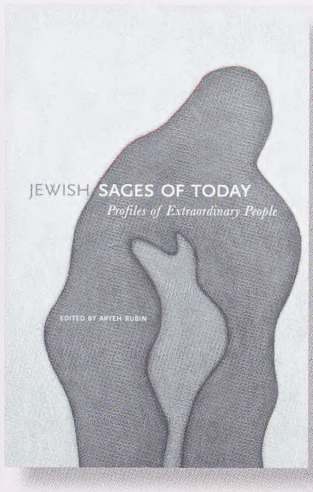
NEW BOOKS BY AND ABOUT LILITH EDITORS!

Breaking the Bank is the new novel by Lilith fiction editor **Yona Zeldis McDonough**, whose earlier novels and anthologies have won raves. Find out more at *yonazeldismcdonough.com*.

Jewish Sages of Today: Profiles of Extraordinary People, edited by **Aryeh Rubin**, profiles women and men whose work has had a significant impact on Jewish life today, including Lilith editor in chief **Susan Weidman Schneider** and Lilith contributing editors **Blu Greenberg**, **Judith Hauptman** and **Nessa Rapoport**. Visit *targumshlishi.org* for details.





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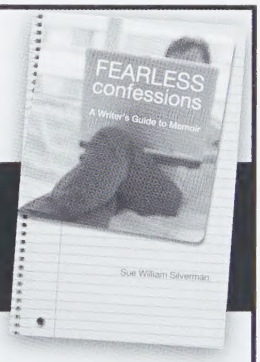
Crafting Art from Personal Experience



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HAPPENING

Marriage, I would rather have a cup of tea.

British artist Mila Tanya Griebel's sterling silver ring (2000) riffs on a quotation from pop singer Boy George ("Sex, I'd rather have a cup of tea") to call attention to *agunot,* women denied a Jewish divorce by their husbands. Another work, "Hevruta-Mituta," 32 skullcaps on a white plastic chess board, created by Israeli artists Hadas Kruk and Anat Stein, draws an analogy between *hevruta* (learning with a partner) and chess competitions. Yarmulkes, in the past often knit by girls—for boys—during lessons in religious school, are emblems here of women's increasing access to male-dominated Orthodox Jewish education and ritual. They're part of an exhibition "Reinventing Ritual," new ritual objects and conceptual art by Oreet Ashery, Helene Aylon, Deborah Grant, Sigalit Landau, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Galya Rosenfeld and others. At The Jewish Museum in New York, September 13, 2009-February 7, 2010 (*thejewishmuseum.org*) and the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, April 22–September 28, 2010, *thecjm.org*.

An anonymous and confidential helpline

has volunteers who provide information, support, and referrals to survivors of abuse in the Jewish Orthodox community. SOVRI volunteers have training in the dynamics of sexual abuse, listening and counseling skills, emergency department protocol, legal issues and post-traumatic stress disorder. Volunteers are supervised by licensed social workers with extensive experience in these issues. Under the auspices of Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan, the helpline is open Monday–Thursday 9:30–5:30 and Friday 9:30–1:30. 212.844.1495.

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

is the grandmother of all Jewish film festivals, now beginning its 30th year. It also offers year-round programs, filmmaker support and a digital media initiative to expand online access to and knowledge about Jewish-subject film. Created with the support of the Charles H. Revson Foundation and Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation, the online resources will include information on the more than 1000 films presented by SFJFF, and 250 titles from the Jewish Heritage Video Collection. *www.sfjff.org*

The Center for Women's Justice

files lawsuits, advocates creative halakhic approaches, and promotes systemic solutions to the complex religious dilemmas that challenge the status of Jewish women: including the *agunah, get* refusal, *mamzer,* and conversion. Attorney Susan Weiss, the director of this non-profit, says on her blog that her work in Israeli rabbinic and family courts is "like being an anthropologist on Mars." *cwjisrael.googlepages.com*

Flowers are not enough.

"You need a need a lot of faith to get out of an abusive relationship" says Naomi Ackerman, American-born Israeli actress and educator who performs her one-woman show all over the world, including the United Nations but especially in synagogues, Jewish schools and churches. Originally produced under the auspices of the Jerusalem Ministry of Welfare for a conference on domestic violence, this 50-minute monologue tells the story of Michal, a young woman from an upper-middle-class family who finds herself in a relationship where love and attention cause her to excuse abuse. Michal explains why she couldn't bring herself to accept help along the slippery slope of denial and plummeting self esteem *www.naomiackerman.com*

She writes

Here's the social networking site for women writers. If you loved the piece on writing groups for women in Lilith's Spring 2009 issue, check out this new project. *shewrites.com*

Mapping the spiritual journey of later life

"On Being an Elder: Distinguished Older Jews Reflect on their Spiritual Journeys in Later Life," a panel moderated by Rabbi Richard F. Address, along with keynotes

A Guide to Tying Headscarves (*Mitpachot Mitapchot*) [Kerchiefs Nurture]

For her senior project as an art student in Jerusalem, Michal Katz created a booklet of creative ways to tie headscarves, particularly those worn by some Orthodox Jewish women. The project grew, and is now a Hebrew book, complete with detailed illustrations, suitable, she notes, as "a gift for brides and any woman who wants to vary her headcoverings." Check out some sample pages at *www.mitpachot.co.il*. Even if you don't read Hebrew, it's fun to see!

by Rabbi Dayle Friedman and Jeff Levin, a video address "From Age-ing to Sage-ing" by Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and skillbuilding workshops. All at a conference for lay and professional leaders, November 19, 2009, in Manhattan, co-sponsored by UJA-Federation of New York's Caring Commission and Hiddur: The Center for Aging and Judaism of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Contact Jodi Ellenbogen at 212.836.1473; *ujafedny.org/spiritual journey*

Last letters from family members

Elisabeth Pollaert Smith, a former attorney and now photographer, is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. Volunteering years ago with the Red Cross in London, her work entailed entering information from letters sent by people searching for family members missing after the Holocaust. These letters often contained copies of the last correspondence received from the missing family member. Now Smith is collecting copies of such last letters to publish them as a book. Each letter will be photographed and appear with a translation if necessary, and a photograph of the letter-writer if available, as well as any commentary the family would like to include. Elisabeth Pollaert Smith: *epollaert@gmail.com*

How can I ask my boyfriend

if he has a sexually transmitted disease? I'm ready to have sex and I want to tell my mom; what should I say? How do I know if I'm gay? A new section of Planned Parenthood's website is dedicated to providing teens with answers to difficult questions and providing tips and guidance for parents and caregivers who could use a little help initiating the conversation. *ppaction.org/ct/b1NN_Z71LTeS/TeenTalk*

Limmud

Founded over 25 years ago in the United Kingdom, and famous for its annual winter conference in London that attracts over 2,000 participants, Limmud is a model that is being replicated all over the world, providing high quality, innovative Jewish educational events for Jews from all walks of life, backgrounds, lifestyles, and ages. November brings Limmud conferences in Argentina, France, and Stockholm, and plans are already in the works for several cities in the United States for 2010. *Limmud.org*

The new Jewish food movement

Join farmers and rabbis, nutritionists and chefs, vegans and omnivores, students and families to explore Jewish food culture, cutting edge food law and policy, food justice, kosher meat issues, health and nutrition, cooking and gardening, and Israeli food and agriculture. Experience do-it-yourself food workshops, cooking demonstrations, lectures, discussions, Shabbat celebrations, and "consciously prepared" food at the 4th annual Hazon Food Conference, December 24-27, 2009 on the Monterey Coast in California. Hazon aims to weave commitments to sustainability into the fabric of Jewish life around the world. *hazon.org/food/conference*

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, check out WHAT'S NEW on the Lilith homepage: *www.Lilith.org*, where you can also sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

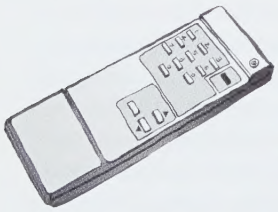
GRASPING FOR THE REMOTE

by DEBORAH ADELMAN

February, 1968. I am 10 years old, sitting with my dying grandmother in her bedroom, watching television. My parents haven't actually told us that Grammy Florence is dying, but my sisters and I know she is really, really ill, and not getting any better. Grammy's had surgery, lost a breast, been in and out of the hospital. She's weak and in pain. She spends most of her time in her big, comfortable bed, and since she doesn't read or write well enough to enjoy it, she mostly watches TV. She has a remote control so she can turn it off without getting out of bed, something that is becoming increasingly difficult for her to do.

My dad got angry at me just a few days ago, when I didn't respond to Grammy's soft cries from upstairs, asking me for help. He knew I was lying when I told him I hadn't heard her, but I wasn't able to find the right words to explain the panic I felt, how her moans left me feeling helpless, unable to assist, as if ignoring them would make the situation go away.

Grammy Florence has been living with us for the last few months, since Grandpa died. We've given her the middle bedroom on the second floor, sending some more of us girls upstairs into the remodeled attic. And my parents have installed a second cutting board, to avoid mixing our treif with her kosher. Grammy came to the United States from a small village in Poland, where she grew up



The news was tough that year.

gardening and raising animals. Everything about her—her voice, her smile, the way she cooks and eats and drinks coffee with chicory—is from someplace else, someplace far away and unimaginable. In the summer, when we live at Camp Sidney Cohen, she grows vegetables and milks the goat. We are as amazed at her ability to grab the little teats and produce a stream of warm milk as she is amused by our astounded looks, as if she has performed an incredible magic trick. She likes to wear her hair in braids she pins along both sides of her head, and tells us stories about a fictional Polish peasant girl she has created, Pola Kayushka, a friendly, folksy kind of girl. Grammy even dresses my youngest sister in a peasant girl outfit she creates from random items, and has her pretend that she is Pola, come for a visit to see the four American granddaughters in Milwaukee. Grammy knows how to take a pile of rags and tie them in knots, creating the form of a girl, a true rag doll, bland and faceless, nothing like the grinning Raggedy Anne dolls one can buy in a store.

My sisters and I like to hang around with Grammy in her bedroom. She is gentle and likes to joke and play with us, even now, when she is feeling bad. On this winter evening, I am alone with her in her room. Outside it is frozen-cold, but our house, despite the bitter weather outside, is warm, and I feel cozy in my pajamas sitting next to my grandmother, forgetting for a moment that she is never comfortable anymore, never free of pain, forgetting how her little moans, as she becomes sicker, send fear through me. Right now, everything seems fine, as it should be, Grammy and me, under the blankets.

But then the television news comes on. An announcer's voice warns us we are about to see something brutal, the execution of a Viet Cong operative by a South Vietnamese army officer, an incident captured accidentally by an American photographer. The warning shakes my grandmother and she reaches for the remote control lost somewhere in the blankets, and she can't find it, and she fumbles, sounding frightened, saying No, no. But she can't find the remote, and I am paralyzed and confused and don't help her. My grandmother has no doubt: she does not want to see this, doesn't want me to see it. I don't either. Or do I? Some tiny little part of me, deep inside, does. I know this, even as I feel the terror she feels take over me, too. I do. I don't. I do.

Grammy doesn't find the remote on time and she can't turn off the TV. It's lost in the bed and she tells me in a sharp, urgent voice to close my eyes, not to look, and she bows her head and covers her own eyes. I do, too, but not completely.

I peek.

There are two men standing there. It's clearly someplace far away and hot, as the men are bare- armed, something we haven't been in months, and they seem sweaty. They're not dressed like soldiers, although behind the officer there is another man in a military helmet watching the whole scene unfold. But the executing officer is bareheaded and has his sleeves rolled up as if he is about to go out and work in a field, and the tiny man about to be executed wears a simple plaid shirt, open at the neck, arms handcuffed behind his back.

It happens so fast. The officer raises his pistol and aims at the head of the man in the plaid shirt, and in one fluid, simple gesture, he fires. For one fleeting instant, a horrible expression passes over the face of the tiny man in the plaid shirt as the bullet travels through his brain, and then he crumples to the ground.

He is dead.

I have witnessed an execution

How quickly a man goes from the living to the dead. The border between the two seems so shockingly fragile, so easily crossed, though not for Grammy, whose suffering will still go on for months.

My grandmother, whose oldest son was killed by enemy mortar fire somewhere along the French-German border in 1944, is crying. Oh, this brutality. Worse, she has failed to protect me. And I sit, miserable, mute. I could have jumped out of bed and turned off the television. But I didn't. And though I am only 10, I know that soon she will be gone, and I have lost this one small chance to protect her. ■

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